



SLAVERY in the ISLAMIC WORLD

ITS CHARACTERISTICS & COMMONALITY

EDITED BY
MARY ANN FAY



Slavery in the Islamic World

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Editor

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Its Characteristics and Commonality

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Editor

Mary Ann Fay
Morgan State University
Baltimore, MD, USA

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CONTENTS

1	Introduction: What Is Islamic About Slavery in the Islamic World?	1
	Mary Ann Fay	
2	“What Is Islamic About Slavery in Muslim Societies?” Cooper, Concubinage and Contemporary Legacies of ‘Islamic Slavery’ in North, West and East Africa	7
	E. Ann McDougall	
3	Reading the Hidden History of the Cape: Islam and Slavery in the Making of Race and Sex in South Africa	37
	Gabeba Baderoon	
4	French and English Orientalisms and the Study of Slavery and Abolition in North Africa and the Middle East: What Are the Connections?	51
	Diane Robinson-Dunn	
5	The Figure of the Eunuch in the <i>Lettres persanes</i> : Re-evaluation and Resistance	75
	Sarga Moussa	

6	Gender, Race and Slavery in the Mamluk Households of Eighteenth-Century Egypt	91
	Mary Ann Fay	
7	Africans in the Palace: The Testimony of Taj al-Saltana Qajar from the Royal Harem in Iran	101
	Anthony A. Lee	
8	Encountering Domestic Slavery: A Narrative from the Arabian Gulf	125
	Rima Sabban	
9	“Tyran[n]ical Masters Are the Turks”: The Comparative Context of Barbary Slavery	155
	Christine E. Sears	
10	The “Slave Wife” Between Private Household and Public Order in Colonial Algeria (1848–1906)	179
	Sarah Ghabrial	
	Index	203

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

E. Ann McDougall is Professor of History, Department of History and Classics, at the University of Alberta, Edmonton, Canada. Recent publications include: “Three Women of the Sahara: Fatma, Odette and Sophie” in J. Byfield and D. Hodgson Eds., *Global Africa* (2017); “Colonial labour, Tawdenni and ‘L’enfer du sel’: the struggle from slave to free labour in a Saharan salt mine”, *Labour History*, 58, 2017; “‘Hidden in Plain Sight’: haratin in Nouakchott’s urban niches”, Baz Lecoq and Eric Haonou Eds. “Post-Slavery”, *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 48:2, 2015.

Gabeba Baderoon is the author of *Regarding Muslims: From Slavery to Post-apartheid* (awarded the 2017 National Institute for the Humanities and Social Sciences Best Non-fiction Monograph Award) and the poetry collections *The Dream in the Next Body*, *A hundred silences* and *The History of Intimacy*. With Alicia Decker, Baderoon co-directs the African Feminist Initiative at Pennsylvania State University, where she is an Associate Professor of Women’s, Gender and Sexuality Studies and African Studies. Baderoon is a member of the editorial board of the African Poetry Book Fund. She is an Extraordinary Professor of English at Stellenbosch University and a Fellow of the Stellenbosch Institute for Advanced Study.

Mary Ann Fay is former Associate Professor of History in the Department of History and Geography at Morgan State University, USA, and is the author of *Unveiling the Harem: Elite Women and the Paradox of Seclusion in Eighteenth-Century Cairo*.

Sarah Ghabrial is Assistant Professor of Law and Society with a focus on the Global South, cross-appointed to the departments of History and Political Science at Concordia University in Montreal. She specializes in the history of the Maghreb and France in the modern period and is particularly interested in questions of gender, race, colonialism, pluralism and modernity, as well as Islamic law and society. Her book manuscript in progress is a social and gender history of the French colonial administration of Islamic “family law” in Algeria from 1870 to 1930.

Anthony A. Lee teaches African history and African-American history at UCLA and at West Los Angeles College. His current interest is in African slaves in Iran in the nineteenth century. His most recent publication is the volume, edited with Awet T. Weldemichael and Edward A. Alpers, *Changing Horizons of African History* (Africa World Press, 2017).

Sarga Moussa received his degree from the University of Geneva (Switzerland) in 1993. He is Director of Research at the National Center for Scientific Research in France and a member of the research team THALIM (CNRS-University of Paris 3: Sorbonne Nouvelle). He is a specialist in literary Orientalism through a broad nineteenth century and works also on the representation of slavery and the discourse of race. He has published extensively about travellers in the Orient in French literature, and he edited *Littérature et esclavage, XVIIIe-XIXe siècles*, Paris, Desjonquères, 2010. His most recent work is entitled *Le Mythe bédouin chez les voyageurs aux XVIIIe et XIXe siècles*, Paris, Presses de l'Université Paris-Sorbonne, 2016.

Diane Robinson-Dunn is a historian and scholar who specializes in the British Empire, more specifically the study of transnational, cross-cultural movements that developed in the course of imperial expansion during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, from the Near or Middle to Far East. She received her Ph.D. from Stony Brook University and studied Arabic at the Arabic Language Institute, The American University in Cairo. She is Professor in the Department of History at the University of Detroit Mercy and the author of *The Harem, Slavery and British Imperial Culture*.

Rima Sabban is Associate Professor of Sociology and is currently the Assistant Dean for Research and Graduate Studies at Zayed University. She is the author of two books, *Maids Crossing* and *Motherhood*. She has authored and co-authored numerous book chapters and papers on youth,

globalization and Gulf civil society. Sabban is a recipient of numerous research grants, including one from the National Research Foundation in which she worked on globalization and the transformation of the UAE family.

Christine E. Sears is Associate Professor of History at the University of Alabama in Huntsville, where she teaches courses in comparative slavery, the Atlantic world, and the early American republic. Her first book, *American Slaves and African Masters* (Palgrave, 2012), explores the slaveries endured by Americans captured by Barbary pirates and shipwrecked in the Western Sahara. She co-edited *New Directions in Slavery Studies: Commodification, Community and Comparisons in Slave Studies* (LSU Press, 2015) and contributed an essay entitled “‘In Algiers, the City of Bondage’: Comparative Slavery in the Urban Context,” which challenges the notion that slavery was ill-suited to urban environments.

LIST OF FIGURES

Fig. 4.1	<i>The White Slave</i> , 1888 (oil on canvas), Lecomte du Nouÿ, Jean-Jules-Antoine (1842–1923)/Musée des Beaux-Arts, Nantes, France/Bridgeman Images	58
Fig. 4.2	Sir William Allan, <i>The Slave Market</i> , Constantinople, National Galleries of Scotland	60
Fig. 4.3	Jean-Leon Gérôme, <i>The Slave Market</i> , 1866 (Image courtesy of the Clark Art Institute, Williamstown, Massachusetts, USA)	61
Fig. 4.4	Harem: After the Bath, c.1894 (color litho), Bouchard, Paul Louis (1853–1937)/Private Collection/Photo © Fototeca Gilardi/Bridgeman Images	62
Fig. 4.5	Adrien Tanoux, <i>Après le Bain</i> , 1912 © RMN-Grand Palais/Art Resource, NY	63
Fig. 4.6	Sketch by Arthur Munby, 1828–1910 (Poem Credit: Poem by Mohja Kahf. Reprinted with permission of the University Press of Florida)	64
Fig. 7.1	Taj al-Saltana as a young woman, apparently taken from a newspaper clipping. (Source: <i>Crowning Anguish</i> , 311)	105
Fig. 7.2	Painting of Taj al-Saltana. (Source: <i>Crowning Anguish</i> , frontispiece)	106
Fig. 7.3	The young E'temad al-Dowleh (later, Muzaffar al-Din Shah), the son of Nasir al-Din Shah, surrounded by aristocratic relatives and enslaved African women. (Source: Middle East Eye. http://www.middleeasteye.net/in-depth/features/they-are-iranian-discovering-african-history-and-slavery-iran-970665328)	110

Fig. 7.4	Agha Mehrab, an African Eunuch in the Harem of Nasir al-Din Shah. (Source: Mirzai, <i>History of Slavery</i> , 110. From the Golestan Palace)	112
Fig. 10.1	Ghardaia mission station. (Source: AGMAfr—Archives Générales des Missionnaires d’Afrique—Photothèque. Rome. Italie, 2010)	191
Fig. 10.2	White Sisters with néophytes. (Source: AGMAfr—Archives Générales des Missionnaires d’Afrique—Photothèque. Rome. Italie, 2010)	191



CHAPTER 1

Introduction: What Is Islamic About Slavery in the Islamic World?

Mary Ann Fay

Scholars of slavery in the Islamic world of the Middle East and North Africa arrived as late-comers to the field of slavery studies and have, therefore, inherited a large body of research with various approaches to the subject that have informed the study of slavery in the Islamic world. One of the goals for this collection is to determine where slavery in the Islamic world fits within the global history of slavery and the various models that have been developed to analyze it. To that end, the proposed volume will also focus on a question about Islamic slavery that has frequently been asked but not answered satisfactorily, namely, what is Islamic about slavery in the Islamic world. Another goal is to contribute to the scholarly research on slavery in the Islamic lands, which continues to be understudied and under-represented in global slavery studies.

The nine authors in this proposed volume come from various fields including history, sociology, literature, women's studies, African studies and comparative slavery studies. The authors use various methodologies for analytical purposes including gender, race and sexuality that are grounded in the specificities of the historical context. The geography of

M. A. Fay (✉)
Morgan State University, Baltimore, MD, USA

slavery in the proposed volume encompasses the Middle East and North Africa as well as East and West Africa, the Indian Ocean and Cape Town, South Africa. Before discussing the content of the proposed volume, I want to comment briefly on the various approaches to the study of slavery and critique their usefulness for studies of Islamic slavery.

Until fairly recently, the paradigm for global slavery—the acquisition of slaves, their treatment in captivity, the relationship between the slaves and their master and the slaves and the law—was based on Atlantic or New World slavery. In his exhaustive 1982 study of slavery from the ancient world to the nineteenth century, Orlando Patterson created a model for slavery based on what he described as the “social death” of the slave. According to Patterson, slavery was based on the most extreme form of domination exercised by the master and the total powerlessness of the slave. The result was the “total alienation and deracination” of the slave. A slave “ceased to belong to any legitimate social order.” Thus, “slaves were isolated from the social heritage of their ancestors,” and “not allowed freely to integrate the experience of their ancestors into their lives, to inform their understanding of social reality with the inherited meanings of their natural forebears, or to anchor the living present in any conscious community of memory.”

Patterson’s study was challenged by scholars who rejected the concept of a universal model of slavery as practiced in the West and also of the alleged “social death” of slaves. The scholars contributing to this volume, while refraining from describing any form of slavery as “benign,” note that the humanity of slaves could be preserved in various ways including the regulation of slavery by the law, the community consensus on how slaves should be treated, and the particular way that household slavery endowed the enslaved—in particular eunuchs and concubines—with agency and even authority.

For most of world history, the chattel slavery of the sugar, rice and cotton plantations of the Americas, the Caribbean and Brazil was regarded as the paradigm for global slavery. However, scholars of non-Western slavery argued that slavery as practiced in Africa, the Middle East, the Indian sub-continent and East and South Asia was in fact the norm and New World slavery, the deviation. As early as 1977, Suzanne Miers and Igor Kopytoff proposed, based on their research, that slavery in Africa was more benign because it did not follow the Western model.

Claire C. Klein and Martin H. Robertson’s research on sub-Saharan African slavery showed that slaves were predominantly female although accounts of African slavery were written as though slaves were exclusively

male. Other scholars of African slavery have noted that slavery was unlikely to be lifelong or hereditary and have noted the importance of the assimilation of slaves into kin groups. Anthropologists introduced to slavery studies the concept of rights in persons that conceptualize slavery on a continuum from free person to slave.

An appropriate model or approach to slavery in Muslim societies appears to be one that was first articulated by Moses I. Finley in 1980 in which he made the distinction between “societies with slaves and slave societies.” Ira Berlin in his 1998 history of slavery, *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America*, elaborated on Finley’s insight by distinguishing between a slave society and a society with slaves. According to Berlin, the distinction was that in slave societies, slavery stood at the center of economic production and the master-slave relationship, which provided the model for all social relations. In a society with slaves, the slaves were marginal to the central productive process and slavery was just one form of labor among many. The articles in this collection will demonstrate that slavery in the Middle East adheres closely to the Finley-Berlin model, that is, a society with slaves. One of the tasks of the authors in this volume is to elucidate where and how in the Middle East, a society with slaves had certain characteristics that defined it as Islamic.

Scholars of the Middle East and Islam were slow to develop slavery in the Islamic lands as a field of research and to contribute to the conceptualization of slavery as practiced among Muslims. Various reasons have been given for the reluctance of Middle East scholars to engage in research on slavery. Y. Hakan Erdem, Bernard Lewis and Murray Gordon concluded that the study of slavery has been underdeveloped because of its extreme sensitivity as a topic. Erdem has described the inattention to slavery during the Ottoman period as “near-total collective amnesia” and Gordon has charged “a conspiracy of silence” concerning Arab slavery.

This is no longer the case, and a robust corpus of scholarly literature on slavery in the Islamic world has emerged. One of our goals for this volume is to build on the present scholarship and continue the task of constructing the field of slavery studies and Islam. The volume makes a significant and timely contribution to Middle East and Islamic Studies, to the global history of slavery and to the methodologies used for research. The authors in this volume explore new ways of researching slavery that go beyond the law and statistics to questions regarding gender and sexuality, retrieving the voices of individual slaves and making the enslaved the subjects rather than the objects of history. To name but a few, the approach of this volume

builds on the pioneering work of Terence Walz and Kenneth Cuno (eds.), *Race and Slavery in the Middle East*; Madeline Zilfi, *Women and Slavery in the Late Ottoman Empire*; Ehud Toledano, *Slavery and Abolition in the Ottoman Middle East*; Eve M. Trout Powell, *Tell This in My Memory: Stories of Enslavement from Egypt, Sudan, and the Ottoman Empire*; and Kecia Ali, *Marriage and Slavery in Early Islam*.

The nine chapters in this volume also demonstrate that slavery in the Islamic lands was not race-based as was New World slavery where the slaves were Black and when being Black in the American South, for example, meant to be a slave. The enslaved males and females in the Islamic lands came from different parts of the globe making slavery more diverse. Europeans and Americans were captured and enslaved in North Africa and White slaves were brought to the region from the Georgia and Circassia. The Middle East was linked to the Indian Ocean trade by various trade routes, which provided African slaves to Arabia, Oman, Persia and the sheikhdoms of the Persian Gulf as well as to Egypt and North Africa.

In addition to contributing to the research on slaves and masters, the individual authors confront and respond to a question that has been on the fringes of scholarly inquiry concerning slavery in Middle East and Islamic studies but that has not been answered satisfactorily: What is Islamic about slavery in the Islamic world? Considered together, the articles problematize the existence of Islamic slavery as a distinct and coherent system regulating and constructing the practice of slavery around the world. Individually, the authors consider the way(s) in which Islam is a factor in enslaving or being enslaved.

The authors engage with issues and questions such as: Is slavery in the Islamic world a variation of slavery in Africa because it shares some of its characteristics, such as the incorporation of slaves into households and the fact that slavery was usually not lifelong or hereditary? Is it because it is regulated by the law, which applies not only to free-born Muslims but also to slaves? Is it because of the verses in the Qur'an that enjoin Muslims to treat slaves with kindness, preserve their humanity and manumit them? Is it Islamic because of a community consensus on how slaves should be treated or perhaps because of the importance of slave concubines to the reproduction of the family? These questions are addressed in various ways by the authors in their individual chapters.

These articles demonstrate that Islam provides a universal template which structures the slave-master relationship. The Qur'an and Islamic law provide a framework governing treatment and manumission. The con-

straining institution of law was largely absent in the New World. Nevertheless, historical context clearly matters. The contributions to this volume include studies of North Africa (MacDougall, Dunn, Sears and Ghabrial), Iran and/or Persia (Moussa and Lee), Egypt (Fay), the Arabian Peninsula (Sabban) and South Africa (Baderoon). The authors investigate the ways in which households, politics and geopolitical relations were affected by the practices of slavery. In this sense, *What Is Islamic About Slavery in the Islamic World* provides models and methodologies which we hope will inspire more interdisciplinary and comparative studies of the important issues raised in this volume.



CHAPTER 2

“What Is Islamic About Slavery in Muslim Societies?” Cooper, Concubinage and Contemporary Legacies of ‘Islamic Slavery’ in North, West and East Africa

E. Ann McDougall

PART I: THE QUESTION

“What is Islamic about slavery in an Islamic society in Africa?”, historian Frederick Cooper asked almost thirty years ago as his opening foray into a chapter in an edited collection on *The Ideology of Slavery in Africa* (1981).¹ At that time, he noted that the question was rarely, if ever, asked because it was assumed that slavery was so embedded in Muslim society through religious law, custom and culture, that it was self-explanatory. Slavery was in some way ‘Islamic’ simply by virtue of existing in a culture that defined itself as being Islamic. He briefly explored the main

¹“Islam and Cultural Hegemony: The Ideology of Slaveowners on the East African Coast”, in Paul E. Lovejoy (Ed.), *The Ideology of Slavery in Africa* (Sage Publications, Beverly Hills: 1981):271–308; question p. 271.

E. Ann McDougall (✉)
University of Alberta, Edmonton, AB, Canada
e-mail: ann.mcdougall@ualberta.ca

approaches that ultimately brought one to more or less the same conclusions: it was about social conservatism, inherent (and evolving) racism, patriarchy and most importantly the notion of ‘hegemony’. At the time he wrote, hegemony was understood primarily in terms of an Islamic slavery described as domestic (rather than economic) and benevolent (rather than exploitative). Cooper’s aims in this chapter were multi-faceted, but it is important to remember that because his framework was ‘ideology’, he was looking at the question through the prism of the slave owner, not the slave, operating on the assumption that only the master could articulate and implement the concept. That said, he did criticize extant approaches to the question because scholars were assuming that both slaves and slave owners understood the overarching ideology—be it Islam or something else, in the same ways. He did not assume this nor at that time did his sources allow him in any significant way to challenge it. What he ended up doing was looking at how each group used Islam to further its own interests.²

Here, the literature gave him little to work with from the perspective of slaves, although further into the case study part of the chapter he did draw on a few interviews with former slaves.³ On the other hand, anthropologist Claude Meillassoux had already engaged with the topic Cooper really wanted to address: power. Power and domination over slaves and how they could be implemented in the African context.⁴ Meillassoux had raised the issue of ‘fragility of control’ and what this meant in terms of the emergence of various forms of dependency, patriarchy and reciprocity.⁵ This was something Cooper could work with; Islam as an ideology seemed in many ways to reflect exactly what Meillassoux was suggesting. Moreover, it went some way towards explaining what might be legitimately different about African as compared to American, slavery.⁶ But at that time, the heartland of Islam—the Middle East—was not a region in which scholars

²With the exception of quotations or very specific arguments for which I provide page references, my presentation of Cooper’s chapter should be understood to be drawn from it *passim*.

³“Islam and Cultural Hegemony”, pp. 292–3; reference to interviewing former masters, p. 288.

⁴*Ibid.*, pp. 275, 6.

⁵As discussed by Cooper, pp. 275, 6.

⁶*Ibid.*, pp. 275–8.

looked at slavery at all.⁷ So ironically, the earliest serious research into slavery in Muslim societies actually began in the so-called Muslim margins of Africa—in this instance, along its Indian Ocean shore.

Cooper paid attention to Islamic law. He was not alone in doing so, as he fully acknowledges in his introduction but he was adamant that ‘law’ does not somehow exist in a vacuum, shaping society. Rather, it is the opposite. Moreover, even as law itself evolves over time as a reflection of and reaction to society, what we are witnessing is a dialogic between them, one that must include how people chose to use or implement the contemporary understanding of that law (or those juridical debates).⁸ Cooper does not make this point specifically, but it is explicit in his analysis—namely, that how Islamic law works is entirely dependent upon which jurists’ opinions communities (including local *ulama*⁹) chose to accept. There is never only one possible decision in a given case where different legal perspectives can be drawn upon; in fact, even within the same legal school there can be different ‘opinions’ given by different scholars. So, quite contrary to contemporary impressions about the Muslim world as one composed of competing, strictly defined legal perspectives, for the vast majority of Muslims world-wide, their understanding of ‘local law’ is just that—local. And tied to specific scholars whose opinions they respect and wish to follow. This central dynamic embedded in how Islamic law developed, evolved and expanded is critical to understanding the full implications of Cooper’s analysis.¹⁰

Moving further into both the centrality of law and his analysis (in terms of the chapter itself), Cooper noted that “no area of social life was treated in more detail in the Islamic texts than the status of concubines and their offspring”.¹¹ Having sketched out the basics of these laws, he went on to note that:

⁷ Ehud Toledano’s *Ottoman slave trade and its suppression 1840–1890* (Princeton University Press, Princeton NJ: 1982) had not yet appeared. And Cooper’s original work had been published much earlier in *Plantation Slavery on the East Coast of Africa* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1977).

⁸ “Islam and Cultural Hegemony”, pp. 285–9.

⁹ Islamic scholars.

¹⁰ One of the best discussions of these issues in a general sense is still Jonathan E. Brockopp, *Early Maliki Law* (Brill: 2000). More recently, Ghislaine Lydon and Bruce Hall also point to changing uses of precedent in the West African Sahara: “Excavating Arabic Sources For the History of Slavery in Western Africa,” in *African Slavery/African Voices*, Volume 2 (Ed.) Alice Bellagamba, Sandra Greene, Carolyn Brown and Martin Klein, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016), pp. 15–49.

¹¹ “Islam and Cultural Hegemony”, p. 286.

...in some Muslim countries, such laws were followed exactly, but in others they were not. [while] they were obeyed by and large, on the East African coast [they] cannot simply be explained by reference to the law.... Similar descent rules regarding the children of slave women by their masters are quite common in 'non-Islamic' Africa. The prevalence of such norms reflects the politics of reproduction: expansion of the kinship group was politically important and socially valuable, and the reproductive capacity of slave women could both supplement the biologically limited capacity of free women and allow the master-father a greater degree of control over his progeny.¹²

Cooper here was responding as an Africanist: what we see in Islamic Africa (Muslim African societies), we also see in non-Islamic Africa—therefore, the cause is not Islam, Islam has only learned to embrace a social reality. But the other side of his analytical coin is that this 'Africanist' explanation might also be the 'Islamist' explanation. In other words, the similarity he (rightfully) saw between Muslim and non-Muslim Africa in terms of this specific issue is generic. It gave voice *in law* in the process of the rise of Islam and *in custom* in the process of developing African cultures. However, there is one important distinction to make: 'custom' remained culturally embedded and did not travel well; 'law' became (over several centuries) universalized in Islam precisely so that it could travel as the religion itself expanded. So I would argue that there remains validity in suggesting that the understanding of concubinage and its progeny can in fact be looked at as an 'ideology' specific to the individual societies accepting Islam.¹³

Cooper went on to point out how differently these laws were applied in even as small a world as the East African Coast. He discussed the point specifically in terms of offspring and to what degree they were accepted as 'kin' equal to free-born siblings or 'poor cousins'; he then moved on to look at the concubines themselves in a Royal context wherein racial features and associated cultural traits favoured 'whites', according to various sources.¹⁴ Although, as noted previously, research in the region and on this topic was limited at the time, Cooper pulled out the crucial issues:

¹² Ibid., pp. 286–8.

¹³ With full understanding that the corollary to this is 'if, when and how it is applied – and if, when and why it changes over time'.

¹⁴ Cooper, "Islam and Cultural Hegemony", pp. 286, 7. A fascinating and accessible first-hand account for the latter is Emily Ruete, *Memoirs of an Arabian Princess from Zanzibar* (Dover Publications, 2009).

differing applications of the law according to local circumstances, yes. But even more subtle were his notes about looking at the class and households in which concubines were held and at how both affected the treatment of children born to concubines.

Given that the whole discussion of concubines in fact rested on the legality of manumission—a female slave who became pregnant with the child of her master was to be freed at some point, no later than her master's death—it is natural that Cooper's exploration also moved into this territory. That is to say that Islam did, in many ways and many places, reward those who treated slaves well, taught them to become Muslims and then, within the framework of Islam's legal processes for manumission, freed them.¹⁵

The issue of 'Islamic manumission' deserves more attention in actual historical circumstances than it has received; it has remained one of those topics treated almost solely in terms of what Islam 'says' it is, including frequent references to legally scribed manumission contracts.¹⁶ Part of Islamic manumission is an understood continuing relationship between the former master and his family, and the former slave, the exact nature of this *wala* (its Arabic, Islamic term) varying with local conditions.¹⁷ Cooper indirectly referenced it in speaking of ongoing 'dependencies', although his particular take on the relationship was that it served masters well in preventing the emergence of a slave or former-slave class with self-defined interests. He also explained briefly but clearly that while manumission was genuinely seen as a pious act—which one might therefore argue legitimately made manumission in Muslim societies different from manumission elsewhere—masters' choices about whether or not to undertake this 'pious act' were often based on other criteria, in the case of Cooper's research, concern about the long-term viability of Zanzibar's clove economy.¹⁸

¹⁵ Ibid., pp. 287, 8.

¹⁶ For example, John Hunwick and Eve Troutt Powell (Eds.), *The African Diaspora in the Mediterranean Lands* (Marcus Weiner: 2002), among its primary documents is included what is presented as a 'sample' or 'typical' manumission contract; for a more recent and critical view, see Lydon and Hall, "Excavating Arabic Sources".

¹⁷ Although dated, Daniel Pipes, "Mawlas: freed slaves and converts in early Islam", in John Ralph Willis (Ed.), *Slaves and Slavery in Africa*, Vol. 1 (1985): 199–247, remains an excellent introduction from both a legal and an historical perspective. Most recently (in fact 'forthcoming' as this is written): Abdel Wedoud ould Cheikh, "Géographie de la liberté: Émancipation légale, émancipation foncière et appartenance tribale en Mauritanie"; and Benjamin Acloque, "Les liens serviles en milieu rural: le statut des Ḥarāṭīn et leur attachement à l'agriculture et à l'élevage", in E. Ann McDougall (Ed.), *Invisible People: a History of the Haratine of Southern Morocco and Mauritania* [working title] (Editions Karthala; forthcoming).

¹⁸ "Islam and Cultural Hegemony", p. 288.

But in the case of concubines who bore children for their masters or in Maliki law, even became pregnant with their master's child ('birth' was not a necessary pre-condition), their '*umm al-walad*' or 'mother-of-the-child' status was bestowed by *sharia* (religious law). This, in turn, guaranteed manumission. In this situation, neither 'piety' nor 'choice' was involved.¹⁹

Which brings me back to the questions suggested by Cooper's analysis that I wish to push further: in drawing our attention so specifically to 'the social area treated in more detail than any other', namely concubines and their offspring, he also inadvertently drew attention to the issue of gender. That is to say that when he raised the question of 'whose understanding of Islam are we looking at' and argued that it was likely the understanding of slave holders (the 'ideology' upon which his whole analysis of hegemony was based) would differ from that of slaves, there was no suggestion that perhaps both social categories might also differ within themselves, as well as across class boundaries, *according to gender*. Women were not only slave-managers, they too were slave owners. Did their view of their role as Muslims vis-à-vis slaves differ from that of their male kin, for example? Did the fact that women often acquired their slaves as part of their dowry or inheritance from both male and female kin—as opposed to say, men's likelihood of having acquired their slaves through market purchase or their having acquired 'twice as many slaves' from any given inheritance legacy as women—affect the 'Islamic cultural hegemony' to which they all subscribed? Although sharing the religious understanding that good Muslim masters helped make good Muslims of their slaves, did the very different roles men and women played in that educative 'making-of-the-Muslim-slave' which tended to replicate the very different roles they played in bringing up and educating Muslim children, make for significantly different understanding in terms of experience? And experiences so significantly different as to challenge assumptions based only on the role of men? This question extends to a range of 'female-specific' familial and social roles: how did they intrude upon and shape the 'mistress-slave' experience differently from that lived by their male kin?²⁰

¹⁹ Brockopp, *Maliki Law*, pp. 192–203; specifically on when one was considered *umm al-walad*, pp. 200–3.

²⁰ While not focused on slavery in either African or Islamic societies, Elizabeth Fox Genovese's work on slavery as an institution within the household in the American context is undeservedly overlooked by Africanists. Although it identified the roles of 'women', it included those of both the 'black slave' and the 'white mistress' at a moment when

As for the slaves themselves, Cooper has already drawn attention to a very significant difference between the meaning of Islam for men and for women by highlighting the social importance (at least legally speaking) of concubinage and its offspring. While he did pursue the question of offspring in the sense of just how ‘free and equal’ they were in a given community, there remain many questions about the female slaves who were concubines themselves. Not least of these questions concerns the context itself: a woman taken as an occasional partner? An openly declared ‘slave wife’?²¹ A member of an elite household’s harem or even a royal harem? Furthermore: how was she regarded by other slaves in the harem or household? As *umm al-walad*, how was she treated by other ‘free women’—the wives, sisters, mothers, in the household? A question which also speaks to the issue of treatment: how did free women in any given household experience and engage with an institution that affected them so personally but in ways clearly different from the male-masters involved—their husbands, uncles, brothers and sons? All of these questions, in and of themselves only a small subset of what could be asked, speak to the larger issue of ‘gender and slavery’ within a Muslim society.²²

I in no way attempt to engage with all of these questions below; nor is my treatment of those I do address anywhere near comprehensive. While there is today, unlike when Cooper wrote, a burgeoning relevant literature,²³ I limit my discussion largely to material I have either previously

Africanist academics were emphatically refusing to see both whites and masters as legitimate ‘African History’. [*Within the Plantation Household: Black and White Women of the Old South* (University of North Carolina Press, 1988).]

²¹ Abdul Sheriff, “Suria: concubine or secondary slave wife? The case of Zanzibar in the nineteenth century”, in Gwyn Campbell and Elizabeth Elbourne (Eds.), *Sex, Power and Slavery* (Ohio University Press, 2014): 66–80. Also (same collection), discussed in different context: E. Ann McDougall, “‘To Marry One’s Slave is as Easy as Eating a Meal’: the dynamics of carnal relations within Saharan slavery”, pp. 140–66.

²² There are many ‘memoirs’ that indirectly address some (if not all) of these questions, but one of the most useful for the African and Islamic context is Huda Shaarawi, *Harem Years: The Memoirs of an Egyptian Feminist 1879–1924* (Feminist Press at CUNY, 1987).

²³ ‘Slavery Studies’ in Africa and increasingly in the Middle East continue to flourish. Research on women, households (royal and elite), concubinage and Islam cross-cut both and appear as chapters in collections as well as monographs and collections directed specifically to these inter-related topics. For example, Marilyn Booth, *Harem Histories: Envisioning Places and Living Spaces* (Duke University Press, 2010); Mary Ann Fay, *Unveiling the Harem: Elite Women and the Paradox of Seclusion in Eighteenth-Century Cairo* (Syracuse New York, 2012); Eve Troutt Powell, *Tell this in My Memory: Stories of Enslavement from Egypt, Sudan and the Ottoman Empire* (Stanford University Press, 2012); Sheriff (above). And very rele-

analysed or recently collected and not yet published. I argue that Cooper's question is still central to our field of study in large part because we have not yet fully understood the role gender played in making slavery 'Islamic'.

PART II: WOMEN AND SLAVERY—MISTRESSES, SLAVES AND CONCUBINES

One important aspect of Cooper's approach, noted above but not elaborated upon, was his understanding that to speak of 'slavery' as an institution was to *speak of both slaves and slave holders* and the extent to which they interacted in a shared ideology. In our well-intentioned efforts to give voice to the voiceless, to see the world from the perspective of the subalterns and so on, we sometimes forget that as an institution slavery was an ongoing interaction between masters and slaves. And at least in many Muslim societies, also between slaves and slaves, and slaves and freed slaves—in other words, a multi-faceted set of relationships even more complex than Cooper's 'owner-owned' dichotomy. Below, I take this acknowledgement as my base assumption, adding to it a specific eye for gender. Or to be more specific, women, as I am not really pushing the comparison between male and female experiences sufficiently enough to claim a completely gendered analysis. It is my intent, however, to suggest strongly that any analysis of 'slavery' wherever or whenever practiced needs this gender-conscious component if a fuller (probably never 'full') understanding of how the institution played into the social dynamics of the rest of society is to be gained.²⁴

Below, we meet several women from different parts of North, West and East Africa. Two of them (Baba and Bi Kaje) were slave 'mistresses'²⁵; the

vant from a legal perspective: Kecia Ali, *Marriage and Slavery in Early Islam* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2010).

²⁴ An observation: it is not that we fail to acknowledge that slave experience can be determined as much by gender as by institutional structure, but that we still stop short in most instances of integrating these distinct experiences into depictions of such structures. Interestingly, one area where we do see this gender consciousness is within studies of the harem, such as the seminal study by Leslie Peirce, *The Imperial Harem* (Oxford University Press, 1993). Although subtitled 'women and sovereignty', she approaches the harem as a household and identifies roles for male as well as female slaves, not only the better known eunuchs and concubines.

²⁵ Baba: Mary F. Smith, *Baba of Karo* (Yale University Press, 1954); Bi Kaje: Margaret Strobel and Sarah Mirza, *Three Swahili Women* (Indiana University Press, 1989); references here are from McDougall's discussion of them in her "Hidden in the Household: gender and class in the study of Islam in Africa", in E. Ann McDougall (Ed.) *Engaging with a Legacy*:

rest (Aichata, Minata, Fatma, Medeym, ‘Faytma’ and Faida) were slaves.²⁶ However, they were more than that—they were concubines [*jariya* sing; *jawari* pl. in *hassaniya* (Mauritania, southern Morocco); *suria* sing; *masuria* pl. in Swahili (East Africa)] and (with one exception), in Islamic terminology, they were *umm al-walad*—they had each given birth to at least one child by their master.²⁷

Although Cooper paid special attention to this category of slave, ultimately he dismissed it as not constituting anything particularly ‘Muslim’. The Moroccan-Mauritanian stories of Aichata, Minata, Fatma and subsequently Meydem, read alongside ‘Faytma’s’ and Faida’s, suggest otherwise. So too does Bi Kaje’s account of her East African Swahili society. In fact, only Baba (‘of Karo’), from Northern Nigeria, did not speak directly to domestic concubinage. However, even she indirectly underscored its role and its loose adherence to Islamic law, in noting that one of the few significant changes that colonialism brought related to the Chiefs’ (meaning the Fulani rulers of the new nineteenth-century Sokoto Caliphate and its Emirates) habit of treating their Hausa daughters as the equivalent of slaves. “In the old days if a Chief liked the look of your daughter he would take her and put her in his house; you could do nothing about it. Now they don’t do that”, she affirmed.²⁸ This is actually the only reference in these histories to the most well-known form of Islamic concubinage, namely, the royal harem, which was found in every Emirate of the Caliphate. While this did exist elsewhere in Africa,²⁹ in contrast to the Middle East and especially the Abbasid and Ottoman Empires, it was a small and rela-

Nehemia Levtzion (1935–2003) (Routledge, 2012; originally published as special issue of *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, 2008): 508–45.

²⁶ Faytma: “A sense of self: the life of Fatma Barka”, *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, Vol. 32, 2, 1998: 285–315; Aichata, Minata, Fatma: “Living the Legacy of Slavery in Mauritania: between discourse and reality”, *Cahiers d’études Africaines* #179–90; ‘Esclave modern ou modernité de l’esclavage?’, 2005:957–86, further developed in unpublished papers presented at Columbia University ‘Ifriqiyya Colloquium’ 2013 and Dept. of History, Dalhousie University, 2015; Medeym: “A topsy-turvy world: slaves and freed-slaves in the Mauritanian Adrar, 1910–1950”, in Suzanne Miers and Richard Roberts, *The End of Slavery in Africa* (University of Wisconsin Press, 1988; reprint 2005): 362–88, also in “Living the Legacy” (above).

²⁷ Lydon and Hall, “Excavating Arabic Sources”, especially pp. 35–8.

²⁸ Smith, *Baba of Karo*, p. 68.

²⁹ For example, in Morocco and Bornu from the sixteenth century forward. The former continued to bring young ‘country’ girls into the Royal Palace in something resembling a harem well into the twentieth century.

tively unimportant articulation of the institution compared with household domestic concubinage. In fact, Cooper's brief discussion of the Zanzibar sultan's harem and the functioning of slavery within it recounts one of the very few situations of sub-Saharan harem concubinage.³⁰

Much more common and I would argue typical, were the experiences of women like Aichata, Minata, Fatma and Medeym. All were taken into slavery in the colonial French Soudan as young girls.³¹ The first three, cousins and sisters, made the trans-Saharan voyage to Goulimine in southern Morocco sometime very early in the century. Minata and Fatma were later brought (or sent) by their respective masters back to Shinqiti, an ancient centre of Islamic learning and commerce in central Mauritania and Atar, the nearby, newly developed French administrative centre. Medeym was captured in what is probably today's Mali at the age of nine, with her mother and younger brother; together they were sold to a well-known property owner and merchant in Atar in 1947. His name was Hamody and he was son of Fatma. Medeym would later become his secret concubine.³²

Aichata is said to have had many daughters with her master, a prominent Goulimine merchant; if this is true, she was *umm al-walad*. But as she disappears from the histories I was able to gather, it is unclear whether she was freed after the first birth and had the rest of her children as a free 'wife', or if she remained in that special status, not slave but not freed (ultimately to become *hartaniyya*³³) until her master's death.

Minata's master was from the very important Awlad Bou Sba commercial clan who operated a business from southern Morocco through Mauritania's Shinqiti and Atar, all the way into Senegal. They had long been known as slave-traders, but they also dealt in other luxury goods. Minata gave birth to a daughter at some point (either in Goulimine or Shinqiti) with her master and thusly, secured her claim on *umm al-walad*

³⁰ One of which is Ruelle, *Memoirs of an Arabian Princess*. For Baba's region, see Catherine Coles and Beverly Mack (Ed.), *Hausa Women in the Twentieth Century* (University of Wisconsin Press, 1991), especially Mack, pp. 109–28; and Heidi Nast, *Concubines and Power: Five Hundred Years in a Northern Nigerian Palace* (University of Minnesota Press, 2005).

³¹ McDougall, "Living the Legacy", pp. 974, 5.

³² McDougall, "Topsy-Turvy World".

³³ An important point: when *umm al-walads* were freed, they did not become 'free', they became 'freed'—that is to say, *hartaniyya*. This is an important distinction; their children born with their master were *free* because they were born from the sperm and blood of a free man. Hence they inherit from their father (and the family), while their *hartaniyya* mothers did not.

status. Her daughter reportedly died at a young age; sometime thereafter, however, her freedom must have been acknowledged because she was eventually ‘on her own’ in Atar. Here she set up in petty commerce and married a *bratani* (freed male slave) of unknown name or origin, with whom she had a daughter. The daughter, Binnami, in turn married a local *bratani*, named ‘Dene’. It is this origin that forms the basis of the well-known Ahmed Salem ould Dene family in Atar that in turn, grew into a branch of the ‘Ahel Hamody’ (see below).³⁴

Fatma’s Goulimine master was of the same powerful Awad Bou Sba clan as Minata’s; she too had a child with him—in this instance a boy. Subsequently she was no longer considered a simple domestic slave but rather was due special treatment. Reportedly, the other women in the household were jealous that a slave had become their equal. One version of her history says that she left because of her Cinderella-like treatment by the other women and ended up in Shinqiti; another that she travelled there with her master but then began to have problems with him. It seems that their son Hamoud, was immediately sent to be with nomadic cousins and never lived with Fatma. Being the mother of an absent master’s son might have contributed to her alleged problems in the family. We only know that Hamoud died in a war against the French in either 1908 or 1910.³⁵

It is unclear when Fatma was officially ‘freed’, although all the supposed problems may have prompted the manumission earlier than in other cases. We do know that at some point she had a daughter with a *bratani* (also of the Awlad Bou Sba). Some say she was married, which would imply that she had been freed to be *hartaniyya* herself; but a reliable informant simply said, “she had a daughter after having had a son” and that this was “after she left her master”,³⁶ leaving somewhat ambiguous her status while in the relationship with the *bratani*. Whatever that may have been, her daughter then went on to marry four times (to whom we do not know) and to become herself an important commercial figure in Atar. She was wealthy enough to support Fatma and her next family; ultimately, she also owned slaves and employed many workers. She was best known for establishing a *waff*, an Islamic endowment to feed the poor in Atar, which continues to function.³⁷

³⁴ McDougall, “Living the Legacy”, pp. 974, 5; see footnotes #47–50 for list of informants, interviews Dec. 2004–Jan. 2005. Also unpublished papers, 2013 and 2015.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Interview Swaifya mint Hamody, Nouakchott 2004.

³⁷ At least it did in 2004. The building and its courtyard, which was still standing, provided shelter to those in need.

Returning to her mother Fatma: all accounts are agreed that while in Shinqiti, she married a *shurfa* (religious man) whose family had come from the important desert oasis of Touat (now in Algeria) to Goulimine and then married into the wealthy commercial Beyruk family. While there is some uncertainty about this husband's social status, the fact that both the daughter and son she had with him are generally considered *haratine* suggests that he was probably *bratani*. It is unlikely that a free Shurfa man would take a *hartaniyya* wife. And the only other consideration would be to say that she was taken as a 'slave concubine' who was not formally freed at this point and that the children were technically born slave. This interpretation has been put forward by some local sources,³⁸ but the idea that a religious man would take someone else's *umm al-walad* as his concubine is difficult to credit. The son was the (now) famous Hamody; Fatma and her children moved to Atar where Hamody's older half-sister supported them and ultimately helped launch Hamody himself in business.

It is Hamody's success that ultimately brought Medeym, her mother and brother to Atar in 1947. It is believed Medeym was about nine when she arrived. She gave birth to her first son with Hamody in 1954, when she would have been about sixteen and her second, two years later. During the time following the first birth, she rarely worked in the main house nor did she live in the slave compound. She lived in a house apart with several *bratani* families, something my informants mentioned 'set her apart' and therefore, raised questions. Nevertheless, the relationship with Hamody was apparently a secret—a very well-kept one.³⁹

Informants spoke of Medeym's 'relationship' with another slave in the household about this time; they said that they assumed the two boy-children were the result of that relationship. To the extent that this is true (and not merely a post-facto constructed legitimization), it suggests that such relationships between slaves in a large slave household were not uncommon. In this instance, the explanation is somewhat suspect because more than one informant mentioned that the first born was 'the spitting image of Hamody'. Although it is possible that Medeym was simultaneously both concubine to Hamody and 'wife' of some sort to another slave,

³⁸ I can only cite 'local gossip'; it would be inappropriate to name sources as this interpretation is a direct challenge to the status of Hamody's family and has not been proven.

³⁹ McDougall, "Topsy-Turvy World", most recently "Living the Legacy", pp. 980–2; especially interviews with Swaifya mint Hamody 2004 and Selka mint Ismail (with whom one of Medeym's sons came to live), 2005.

it is highly unlikely. Hamody's own strenuous efforts to be—and to be seen as—a pious Muslim would have precluded this behaviour.⁴⁰

The secret was revealed upon his death: Hamody had left instructions that Medeym's status as *umm al-walad* of the two boys be acknowledged. She was to be freed and her sons were to be brought into Hamody's immediate family. As it happens, only one son chose to move in with one of Hamody's other sons and his wife; the youngest stayed with his mother, Medeym. But she then (officially) married a local *bratani* and left her second son with her own mother, Fatma, and her brother. By this time, both the mother and the brother had been freed, albeit in different circumstances. Her mother had been freed when Hamody had stepped into a legal dispute over a stolen donkey (hers) to assure that she had the right to fight her case; as a slave, she did not, but as *hartaniyya*, she did.⁴¹ Medeym's brother had been freed to become *bratani* at some point; as freeing men was much more common than freeing women, it is not surprising that there was no recorded moment to which we can refer.

Fatma and her *bratani* husband had another family together that seems to have existed entirely apart from Hamody's household. That said, the youngest son of Fatma and Hamody said in his interview with us that he still had relations with his (then) four new sisters and one brother. Medeym's mother died in 1974. Her younger brother married one of Hamody's *hartaniyya* and remained in Atar. Medeym died between 2000 and 2004.⁴²

The last slave concubine we want to look at here (we will meet Faida in the context of Bi Kaje's story) was also named Fatma, although she later took the name by which her master called her, the more intimate 'Faytma'. [To avoid confusion, I use this name here].⁴³ She too came originally from the French Soudan. At some point early in the colonial era, she was purchased by the Goulimine merchant Mohamed Barka in Timbuktu; she

⁴⁰ Brockopp discusses the first Maliki legal text specifically devoted to the *umm al-walad*, *Early Maliki Law*, pp. 192–203. An *umm al-walad* was considered 'like' a wife in terms of a master's responsibilities, including exclusive rights to sexual services (see also Ali, *Marriage and Slavery in Early Islam*).

⁴¹ A small, seemingly insignificant story but it so vividly illustrates how these different legal statuses could affect daily life. And in this case, an economic crisis triggered what we normally think of as a personal or religious decision. Her son thinks she got her donkey back but is not certain (interview with Isselmou ould Hamody, Atar 2005).

⁴² Interview with Isselmou ould Hamody, 2004.

⁴³ This story (and its interview source material) from McDougall, "A Sense of Self" and most recently, "Hidden in the Household", especially pp. 530–2.

lived there in his household. But she was still a young girl when the family made the definitive trans-Saharan trip back to Goulimine in 1914.⁴⁴

When I interviewed Faytma in the early 1990s, it was initially to learn more about her former master.⁴⁵ But when she recounted her story of having been brought by him across the desert from Timbuktu on two different occasions—almost word-for-word, gesture-for-gesture, I realized that there was more embedded there than I had first realized. For one thing, she repeatedly told numerous anecdotes that underscored how pious and ‘Muslim’ Barka, her master had been, including one in which he allegedly freed one of his male slaves because of the latter’s bravery.⁴⁶ Another of her recollections remained a mystery to me for a very long time: she recounted that when they arrived in Goulimine, she made sure to let people know that she was Barka’s slave. This only made sense to me after her death when it emerged in an interview with other family members that she had been his concubine. Only as his slave could she have legally and rightfully been his concubine. Obviously, if she had been his daughter, as some apparently thought, this would have been seriously wrong. But even if she were someone else’s daughter as a free girl, she could not have been his concubine—this would have been ‘wrong’ for both of them as good Muslims. This seemingly bizarre declaration was actually fundamental to affirming the religiosity of her former master—and, most importantly, her own identity as an extension of his. She saw herself as a very Muslim woman, speaking of her *shaykh*,⁴⁷ refusing to have her picture displayed; in reinforcing (with her remembered stories) the piousness of her former master Barka she was simultaneously, if somewhat obliquely for an outsider, affirming her own religious commitment.

She identified completely with the Barka family, in spite of what an historian might call an injustice regarding her status. It would seem that her only child was with a local *bratani*, a well-digger; she had no children with Barka. Yet on his deathbed, he had asked his family not to treat her as inheritable property—that is as a slave; as she proudly recounted, he announced that she was “their mother and not a slave”.⁴⁸ Again, in retro-

⁴⁴ This is fully discussed in McDougall, “A sense of self”, pp. 296–300 and *passim*.

⁴⁵ Mohamed Barka. He had been a wealthy trans-Saharan merchant based in Timbuktu but initially from Goulimine. My project at the time was looking at Moroccan families whose networks underpinned nineteenth-century trans-Saharan commerce into central and southern Mauritania.

⁴⁶ Messoud, a freed slave that re-appears several times in her story.

⁴⁷ Religious ‘learned man’ whom she venerates.

⁴⁸ McDougall, “A sense of self”, p. 288.

spect, it seems that even though she had never been *umm al-walad*, he was asking them to acknowledge that she deserved recognition of that status.

They did not. She remained slave to the family in, as she said, a powerful position—she ‘held the keys to the kitchen’ for years afterwards. I was unable to determine how many years because for Faytma, the time of her manumission seemed to have been relatively unimportant in the larger scheme of her history. In fact, she only spoke of it once. Unlike other aspects of her story, she could not be brought to re-engage with this element in a subsequent interview. What she did say was that she had asked for ‘paper proof’ of her manumission and had been told that was not necessary. Everyone knew her status.⁴⁹

She had a number of jobs, the first of which was as a bread-baker in the distant commercial town of Tindouf. There she networked with families she had previously met while slave to the Barka family; they recognized her and helped her set up in the market. Later, she ventured into the French-established sardine-processing plant in Agadir, earning enough to buy property and build a house. Her marriage lasted long enough to produce a son. Later she sought Barka family help to divorce her husband and recover the property he allegedly stole from her. She also had ‘family’ help to support a marriage celebration for her son. In return, throughout those years and up to the weeks just before we first interviewed her, she continued to contribute to the family—cooking, cleaning, serving for celebrations, doing all the same for those who were ill. One of her statements at this time resonated strongly: “I am the mother of a very large tribe”.

Sadly, she died before I could return to Goulimine. But my assistant went back to follow up on some related research. Her son showed him something very special: Faytma’s ‘*carte d’identité*’. She had never before had one; she applied for it only after we interviewed her. Her son was sure that it was our interview process that had prompted this action. Its significance? She identified her place of birth as Goulimine and gave her name as ‘Faytma Barka’. In this last yet for her, her first ‘official’ action as a Moroccan citizen she inscribed who she was, who she wanted to be and who she wanted to be remembered as.

Only for historians looking for logic and ‘truth’ would these obvious factual constructions pose a problem.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Ibid.: specifically that she had ‘nothing to fear’.

⁵⁰ This story constitutes an epilogue to “A Sense of Self”. My thanks to Mohamed Nouhi, my original research assistant on the project, who undertook this return trip to Goulimine

Finally, I want to add the perspective of two ‘slave mistresses’ to these stories. Apart from the pre-colonial reference noted above that was so important to Baba, namely that colonialism put an end to a local form of concubinage made ‘legal’ only because the new ruling Fulani had successfully launched a *jihad* against the Hausa declaring that the latter were ‘bad Muslims’,⁵¹ she made no further reference to this aspect of slavery. Bi Kaje, on the other hand, spoke extensively of it in the context of her particular household.

Bi Kaje tells several revealing stories about the women she knew in her own household who had been concubines; indeed it is interesting that the majority of her interview relating to slavery was about recounting their stories.⁵² She emphasized what she called a ‘very special intersection’ between being female and being slave in a Swahili Muslim household. While recognizing and explaining traditional Islamic law with which she was familiar, her own experience suggested that ‘cultural custom’ (in Arabic, *urf*—literally ‘custom of the country’) also played a role. She recounted the story of her father and his concubine, Faida. The woman who raised her father had given him a farm and two slaves. He took one of the latter, Faida, as his concubine and secluded her. She had a child who died and when that happened, “Faida had no work” (that is to say, as a mother):

By our custom, if you make a person a concubine and want to let her go, you should marry her off. You look for another husband and marry her off. If she is not married because you, her master, did not find a husband for her, if she stays unmarried and then gets another man, if she gets pregnant and delivers a child, it must be yours. My father said, “I made her a concubine, when she delivered, the child died.” My father didn’t want her anymore. She built a house for herself and lived there.... Then my father found a person named Msengesi, a slave of Zanzibar people; he returned and married Faida. They stayed here in town. They didn’t build a house, they rented other people’s houses. She had no children.⁵³

on my behalf and brought back a copy of Faytma’s *carte d’identité*. When I once presented this story to an audience of historians, their overall response was: ‘but this was not true; surely you made this point? How could the government issue an official identity paper that was a lie?’ And so on. In short, totally missing the significance of the experience.

⁵¹ Meaning that the Fulani regarded the Hausa as ‘bad Muslims’ and therefore eligible to be enslaved.

⁵² The following from McDougall, “Hidden in the Household”, especially pp. 525–30.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 528.

Although Faida was *umm al-walad*, because her child died her master no longer wanted her in the household. It is interesting that in this situation, ‘marrying her off’ to someone was seen ‘by custom’ as the equivalent of manumission such that any subsequent children would belong to the new husband, not the old master.⁵⁴ It is also significant that she lived on her own; she ‘built a house for herself and lived there’ for some time before Bi Kaje’s father found her a husband.⁵⁵

However whether living independently or not, married or not, Faida’s role within the household continued. She was expected to assist at family ceremonies: “If there was something happening at the main house, naturally she would come. If there was a wedding, she would come. When it was over she would return home. If there was a funeral, she would come and sit through the funeral with everyone else. When it was over, everyone would go home.”⁵⁶

Faida’s situation was not so unusual. Bi Kaje emphasized that ongoing relations between former female slaves and the household were normal. She gave as an example her Aunt’s cook who, although having been freed, continued to live with and look after her former mistress until the latter died. She then moved in with Faida where she “lived out her days”.⁵⁷

One last point that needs to be drawn from both Baba’s and Bi Kaje’s accounts is the intersection between ‘learning and living Islam’ and the lives of women, free and slave alike. Baba was the wife of a *malam* (religious teacher); however her articulation of Islam revolved mostly around the household and how the daily prayer-schedule organized her day. It was not that she prayed herself, at least she did not mention it, but that she noted women’s work and slaves’ work were set in terms of what took place before, between and after particular prayers.⁵⁸

⁵⁴ Again there is ambiguity: if he simply ‘married her off’ without freeing her, legally any children she had would belong to him. But here either she was first manumitted (and Bi Kaje simply omitted that fact) or the marriage was (by local custom) considered its equivalent—in which case the children would be hers (and her husband’s).

⁵⁵ A reminder that her former master still ‘owed’ her a husband: both of them clearly acknowledged this obligation. What she did while waiting for this to happen is unknown and also irrelevant with respect to her master’s obligation.

⁵⁶ Quoted in McDougall, “Hidden in the Household”, p. 528.

⁵⁷ Ibid. She spoke specifically of female slaves; it is not clear what was happening with males.

⁵⁸ Material on Baba drawn here from “Hidden in the Household”, pp. 519–25.

She had much to say about ‘being Muslim’ and slavery as she knew it. Masters freed slaves in order to be rewarded, ‘like giving alms’; it followed that if masters did “not attend to religion, they did not do it [manumit] at all”.⁵⁹ Religion governed the inheritance of slaves as well. Her story is peppered with mentions of how a man would inherit two slaves, a woman one—this seemed to be how free Hausa women became slave mistresses. And while slaves could not inherit, they could marry just like their masters: ‘if a slave had four wives’, she reportedly commented to her biographer, ‘he was probably Muslim’.⁶⁰ Baba emphasized in particular how children born to family slaves were considered Muslim regardless of the faith of their parents; in the seventh-day naming ceremony, they were often given ‘double-names’, one of which invoked Allah in some fashion. After this, they were ‘freed’ and considered ‘kin’. This status (which largely equates with *wala* although she did not use the term) meant that the person had special rights that purchased slaves did not. “We took part in one another’s ceremonies”, she said. “There was kinship. If we had a ceremony, they all brought things to give us; if they had one we all took things to them...”.⁶¹ It was not coincidental, from her perspective, that with the arrival of the British and the enforcement of abolition, it was only the ‘purchased slaves’ who left the household, which included the *rinji* or slave quarters—not those ‘born in the house’.⁶²

There were slaves who were considered ‘fully freed’, however. While she does not explain this distinction (which seems at odds with normal Islamic manumission), she gave as her example the slave boy who became her adopted son. Baba was infertile. And the Hausa, unlike most Muslims including their Fulani rulers, incorporated adoptive practices into their religion; indeed Baba considered the Fulani to be ‘without humanity’ because they only cared for their own children and did not adopt.⁶³ In this instance, *malams*, sacrifices and prayers were involved as the slave was first manumitted by his master, then given a ‘free Muslim name’ (here, Usman) and then physically given by the ‘now-father’ to Baba. “It was as if I had

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 521.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid., p. 522, footnote #38.

⁶³ This in accordance with Maliki law: a child may be cared for by a family but not ‘adopted’ in the sense of being considered part of that family. The exception is when a two-year-old-or-less baby is nursed by the caretaker mother; by this action the child becomes milk-kin and its relations with the family are governed by the ‘behaviour and etiquette’ of kin.

born him [Usman]”, Baba recounted.⁶⁴ The adoption ritual mirrored the invocation of Allah that was also involved with issues of natural birth to assure successful conception, gestation and deliverance.

In addition to Bi Kaje’s specific discussion of concubines and female slaves (above), she like Baba, spoke extensively about the slaves in her family. She commented on the fact that they were divided in different ways between sons and daughters without, however, citing inheritance law as Baba had. Most important in her eyes was the distinction between those ‘purchased in the market’ and those born to the family, which included children of married household slaves as well as those of household slaves and freed/free slaves which seem not to have necessarily been members of the family. These were known as ‘slaves of the household’—*mzalia*, not ‘slaves’ any longer.

Among us, if a person is an *mzalia* once or twice [that is, in terms of generations] you treat them like your own child, if you like....they say: two times an *mzalia* and their father is a freeborn man. But they keep the slave name because the grandmother was purchased [she is speaking of a particular slave history here]. We say you let them free. You write, “This person is free. He is neither my slave nor anyone else’s. I will not make him serve.” Now I have set him or her free; he or she is a freed slave, a *mzalia* lineage, and is not a person to be ordered about.... You seclude her [if a female] like your own child.⁶⁵

While Bi Kaje is not explicit about the relationship between Islamic conversion and ‘being *mzalia*’, her reference to secluding her (the *mzalia* girl/woman) makes clear the religious connotation; moreover, the way she tells the story, it is actually the fact of being secluded that simultaneously marked the woman’s freed status. In another section of her account, she addressed ‘becoming Muslim’ in Swahili society even more directly. She recounted, “A person says, ‘I want to become a Muslim’, along with his wife”:

He will convert, he will become a Muslim, he will be taken to the mosque, he prays, he fasts during Ramadan. Now, if he has a child, that child isn’t anyone’s slave. The father isn’t a slave, he has converted.... A person who leaves his religion and follows ours has surpassed us. In praying, in fasting, he has surpassed those of us who were born into the hand of Islam.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Ibid., pp. 521, 2.

⁶⁵ Bi Kaje, quoted in McDougall, “Hidden in the Household”, pp. 526, 7.

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 527. Another interesting contrast with West and North Africa, at least in earlier centuries when learned scholars clearly opined that conversion was not reason to manumit.

Like Baba, she inextricably linked freeing slaves to Islam. In recounting the story of a woman who had been freed by British rather than Islamic law, by secular authority rather than that of her mistress, Bi Kaje made clear that from her perspective only a ‘properly Muslim educated’ slave should be freed because only he or she could manage life ‘on their own’.⁶⁷ In this instance, the doomed woman had set up a successful business selling palm wine in the market; when told that this was contrary to her religion, she stopped. Ultimately, she sold everything she had accumulated to build a mosque. Although her investment was not enough to complete the building, it was later finished by others and named after her.⁶⁸ From Bi Kaje’s perspective, the story was a sad but instructive one because whereas the woman should have been *mzalia*, continuing under the tutelage of her ‘Muslim family’, British law had set her adrift—then incapable of being a ‘good Muslim’ on her own.

PART III: REVISITING THE QUESTION—WOMEN, SLAVERY AND ‘BEING MUSLIM’ IN HISTORICAL CONTEXT

What, therefore, can we—should we—make of these ‘stories’ in terms of Cooper’s basic question, ‘What is Islamic about slavery in Muslim societies?’?

The first observation I would make is the extent to which living in even a moderately well-off household as a Muslim woman in southern Morocco, Northern Nigeria and East Africa meant living a life in which slaves were an integral part. Mostly this life did not involve heavy labour or significant physical exploitation (although that did exist); rather, it was more about the complicated ways in which Islam implanted slaves into everyone’s lives. Baba and Bi Kaje spoke to how they were involved in helping educate slaves so that they were prepared to become not only Muslims themselves—which, at least in Swahili society, seems to have brought freedom as well—but also Muslim parents to their own children. *Islam was literally being reproduced through the institution of slavery.*

While it was a good master’s duty to educate his (or her) slaves into Islam and there were many reasons for which said slaves could be freed (including upon the master’s/mistresses death), there was no obligation to do so; it was their status at birth which determined their rights (or lack thereof)—as with the slave children in Baba’s household who were considered Muslim at birth, but remained slave.

⁶⁷ Here echoing the main principle guiding the encouragement given to masters and mistresses who wished to be ‘good’ slave owners to educate their slaves into the religion.

⁶⁸ McDougall, “Hidden in the Household”, p. 529.

From another perspective, the fact that mistresses remained connected to these freed slaves as kin, *mzalia*, in so many ways having to do with marriage, divorce, child-bearing/delivery and familial rituals, especially those related to food, created very particular forms of extended family that were fully buttressed by the customs and culture of Islam as it rooted itself locally.⁶⁹

What comes across strongly is that women—slave, free or freed—were central to shaping exactly how such families developed. It is also very telling that Baba’s and Bi Kaje’s recollections mirrored almost exactly Faytma’s own sense of self in this respect. Not only did Faytma’s story involve ongoing interactions with her former master’s family, when we first met her she said she had just come back from spending time caring for the wife of one of Barka’s sons. This was ‘normal’ for someone who both regarded herself and was regarded by the family as the equivalent of *umm al-walad*—“the mother of a very large tribe”. The striking similarity in the stories of women so separated in time, culture, custom and social status suggests that we should look to one important thing they shared other than gender: perhaps there truly was something about ‘being Muslim’ that shaped these women’s experiences *within the institution of household slavery* as it was historically lived.

A second issue that emerges from looking at the slave mistress perspective is the role free Muslim women—wives, mothers, sisters, aunts—played vis-à-vis slave management in a typical household.⁷⁰ Both Baba and Bi Kaje made it clear that on a daily basis, it was women who maintained a proper Muslim house; most importantly, they both confirmed that they were the ones who ensured that slaves married properly, had the subsequent recognition as Muslims and raised their children as proper Muslims. Their responsibilities for their slaves may have no longer been as immedi-

⁶⁹ Underscoring that even as we speak of ‘Islam’, there are different legal schools of thought that do not necessarily agree on questions having to do with slavery, marriage, ‘freed slaves’ and so on. On this issue, see Ali, *Marriage and Slavery in Early Islam*. And local custom also shapes how Islam is understood and ‘lived’. (More on this below.) Equally importantly as Lydon and Hall argue, local usage of juridical precedent also reflects changing local, historical conditions; see “Excavating Arabic Sources”.

⁷⁰ I contrast here perspectives of slave *mistresses* with those Cooper examined of slave *masters*. However, it is worth noting that even research on male slave owners has received little attention since Cooper’s seminal work. Especially noteworthy, therefore, is Sandra Greene’s recent *Slave Owners of West Africa* (Indiana University Press, 2017). Religious (in this case Christian), economic and family considerations are explored in the context of individual biographies (like those we have looked at), to explain slave holders’ decision making during the “nineteenth century of abolition”.

ate as when they lived in the household, but they were no less real. Faytma's story illustrated well how this was understood from the perspective of the former slave. When Faytma's husband apparently stole (and then sold) her property while she was working in Agadir, it was the Barka family who helped her recover what she had lost. And when it was time for her son to marry, it was the Barka family who provided the necessities for the wedding, which included a horse to carry the bride, accommodation and of course, food for several days.

In reading across these three accounts, we are given a strong sense of how a mistress understood her role as a good Muslim slave holder, having little if anything to do with formal, textual Islam, as well as a slave's understanding of what she, as a good Muslim, could and should expect from her former family. In Bi Kaje's story, it was Faida in particular and 'the Aunt's cook' to a lesser extent who showed us how those mutual understandings played out in practice. And Faytma's history that in so many interesting ways paralleled that of Faida's,⁷¹ tends to confirm that we are not getting only a master's or mistress's perspective but also some insight into how slaves themselves understood the institution within which they lived. Mistresses and female slaves, not necessarily concubines although these are the specific cases presented here, had or potentially had long-term relationships that were not only different from those of masters and male slaves—but completely independent of them.

However, there is also something that emerges in these mistress's accounts that needs accentuating and which in turn will allow us to more fully appreciate the stories of the female slaves themselves. Both women not only claimed to be good Muslims (Baba was the wife of a religious teacher, Bi Kaje a self-identified descendant of the 'original' Islamic settlers), they also contrasted their practises of Islam with those of others. Baba frequently commented on how being a Hausa Muslim distinguished her from being a Fulani Muslim. Bi Kaje did the same with respect to the Omani Muslims. Both Fulani and Omani Muslims forcibly gained control of their respective regions (Northern Nigeria, East African Coast—especially Zanzibar) in the nineteenth century. Both therefore were an active part of Baba's and Bi Kaje's lived memory.

⁷¹ It was their respective masters' reactions that differed so dramatically; Faida's removing her from the household because her child died, Faytma's keeping her close in spite of the fact that she did not give him a child.

The important point here is also one to which Cooper alluded but did not explore, namely the reality of different schools of Islamic thought. In the East African context, that reality was starkly etched in the contrast between the Sunni Shafi'i school adopted by the coastal Swahili (like Bi Kaje) and the more conservative 'Ibadism' brought by the Omanis, an important part of the identity the latter created to ensure a class-based difference from 'locals'.⁷² In the case study we looked at, there were several expressions of what Bi Kaje called 'custom' that may in part have reflected some of those legal differences, as well as genuinely absorbed cultural practices. The consideration that conversion constituted manumission for example, which is not everywhere recognized as we saw in both Baba's and Faytma's Maliki law-based communities, is one such example.

On the other hand, the description of generationally achieved freedom can be seen both as typical of many African societies⁷³ and the Islamic notion of *wala* which in some instances is regarded as having a three-generational life.⁷⁴ But again, even that is not practised everywhere. Baba's description of 'kin' was ambiguous as to how long this interdependent relationship was recognized; it seemed to be indefinite, as indeed it was in Fatma's and Medeym's experience.⁷⁵

On a completely different note, Baba's discussion of the importance of adoption to the Muslim Hausa is clearly a reflection of 'custom' being absorbed into Islam. It was precisely such customary practices that the *jihadist* Fulani regime of Uthman dan Fodio and his descendants objected

⁷² Abdul Sheriff, "Race and Class in the Politics of Zanzibar", *Africa Spectrum* 36, 3, 2001: 301–18.

⁷³ This was the argument central to Miers' and Kopytoff's pivotal although much challenged early attempts to define something 'African' about slavery: *Slavery in Africa: Historical and Anthropological Perspectives* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1979); articulated in Ch.1 "African Slavery as an Institution of Marginality", pp. 3–84.

⁷⁴ The term and its meaning are both complex and have changed over time and place. Acloque, "Les Liens Serviles...", notes that technically, *mawali* is applicable over only three generations, but 'custom' as practised in Mauritania overlooks that limitation. This understanding however, is more consistent with the notion of *wala* constituting 'kinship' (and therefore, perpetual—see ould Cheikh, "Géographie de la liberté"); also Bruce Hall, "Memory, slavery and Muslim Citizenship in the post-emancipation circum-Saharan world", in McDougall (Ed.) *Invisible People* (forthcoming). And Pipes, "Mawlas: freed slaves and converts in early Islam".

⁷⁵ In some regions of Mauritania, different terms denote generational distinctions—some terms are even meant to imply that the originary relationship was one of 'clientage' not servility.

to. The healing practice of '*bori*' was another.⁷⁶ Baba's account makes it clear that *bori* was well embedded in their society and remained so: ironically, the custom of secluding women imposed under the Fulani Islamic regime ultimately encouraged its practice.⁷⁷

What these observations show is that even Cooper's nuanced treatment of Islam in the exploration of his question about 'Islamic Slavery' needs further sensitivity as to how much local custom shaped and reshaped Islam in any given historical experience. In both Baba's and Bi Kaje's households, it is very clear from their personal histories the extent to which *their individual understandings of Islam* in turn affected how slavery was experienced and how slaves themselves were acculturated. Given the degree of difference between their ethnic and cultural contexts, it is fair to look to their religious (or 'ideological', to use Cooper's term) framework to explain the impressive similarities between how women and slaves lived in their respective households. And when one draws on Faytma's experiences even further away (southern Morocco) from a 'slave woman's' perspective, those similarities become striking indeed.

Which returns us to the female slaves, the concubines of our story—Faytma, Aichata, Minata, Fatma, Medeym and, of course, Faida. Cooper was not wrong to point out that concubinage is not peculiar to Islam. But what the case studies looked at here reveal is a high level of similarity between values and beliefs. As the cultures definitely differ significantly, as do the historical moments referenced (from the late nineteenth to the early twenty-first centuries), only the religious and gender reference points remain. Yet as noted above, even those can and are interpreted differently according to local experience and the specific families involved. The taking of a female slave for sexual purposes is by no means limited to Muslim masters; what *is* specific are the various laws regulating what happens when she becomes pregnant with or gives birth to his child. The requisite allocation of *umm al-walad* status applies. But how that was 'lived' by her seems to have depended both on custom and individual personalities, those of both masters *and household mistresses*.

Faytma was an interesting case. Clearly, Barka tried to reward his former concubine who was not, technically, *umm al-walad* but whom he

⁷⁶ For an accessible and recent discussion, see David Robinson, *Muslim Societies in African History* (Cambridge University Press, 2004), Case Study: Sokoto Caliphate, especially pp. 139–42.

⁷⁷ McDougall, "Hidden in the Household", p. 524.

clearly regarded with fondness by invoking that status when he reminded his children that ‘she was their mother’. That they chose not to respect their father’s wish does not change the fact that this Islamic law was well-enough understood for Barka to have tried to draw upon it to reward Faytma. What is equally notable, however, is that it was Barka’s daughter who continued to draw upon her services more than others; while we cannot know the details of the ‘family’ decision to have Faytma included among the inheritance, it is clear that at least one of those choosing to disregard Barka’s wish was herself a female slave-mistress.⁷⁸

Medeym was at the other end of the spectrum. She had unquestionably, according to Hamody’s death-statement, given him two boys; she had been legally *umm al-walad* for about eight years before it became known. Whatever the family had thought or suspected, the daughter-in-law who took in the second of these sons said she had wondered about the situation when Hamody insisted that both boys be sent to school and registered with free Muslim names, in spite of the fact that they were ostensibly children of a domestic slave.⁷⁹ It was only after his death that this situation became clear. There was no dispute. That one child remained with his former slave grandmother was a matter of personal choice.⁸⁰ Keeping the counterpart of Medeym a secret from the family was not common practice either in Middle Eastern societies or elsewhere in Africa, but neither was it *haram* (forbidden).⁸¹

Faida’s history in some ways reflects the bits and pieces we know of the three girls (Aichata, Minata, Fatma), to the extent that the nature of the households in which they lived shaped their reality, including the ambiguities becoming *umm al-walad* seemed to introduce. Faida was not wanted by her master after her child died. Minata’s story is suggestive of the same dynamic, although we have no witness like Bi Kaje to confirm. But both

⁷⁸ Given that the information about Faytma’s relationship with Barka was revealed to us after her death and even then not by immediate family, there was no real possibility of exploring this situation further. Indeed, in all honesty, this is pushing into the intimacy of family relations—because yes, Faytma was regarded as family—in ways that would be totally inappropriate for a researcher.

⁷⁹ Interview with Selma mint Ismail, Atar 2005.

⁸⁰ Interview with Isselmou ould Hamody, Atar 2004.

⁸¹ Another example of individual exercising of Islamic law: Hamody may not have exhibited expected behavior, but neither did his religion prohibit his keeping the relationship secret. In several interviews, I posed the questions as to why he might have done so, but no reason was ever suggested.

concubines were ‘looked after’ in terms of moving on in their life: Faïda’s master found her a new husband; Minata’s subsequent marriage, although it may have been made independently of her former master, was very likely assisted (as was her commercial business) by Awlad Bou Sba connections. In Fatma’s case, this connection seems to have not only been retained through her marriage to an Awlad Bou Sba *bratani* but exploited fully by her and latterly, her son Hamody. The commercial and social success of her daughter also cannot be overlooked. While ultimately it is the famous ‘Hamody of Atar’ that people remember, in reality it was his older half-sister Sophie, Fatma’s daughter with the Awlad Bou Sba *bratani* husband, who made his success possible. All of this said, it is significant that Fatma’s problems with the family, whether they were mostly with other women in the household or with the master himself (or possibly both),⁸² reveal how ‘lived Islam’ could be problematic. In no way should we forget that even as Islamic law applies, it is people who do (or do not) implement it. In the case of concubines, the law may be respected, but family realities will determine how that is played out.

These ‘stories’ are all about Muslim families, Muslim masters and Muslim slaves. Their universal reference point is *their* understanding of Islam. In each case, the basic principles of concubinage are clearly evident, but the lived experiences differ in detail according to local understandings. The stories of the three girls suggest that the identity of the masters in each case (each was an important trans-Saharan trader) influenced their personal options as to how they could and did deal with their concubines. Their contingent Muslim significance in Minata’s case provided a suitable new relationship; in Fatma’s situation, their merchant importance meant a political influence with the local Adrar Emir, which in turn seems to have aided Fatma in escaping her difficulties in Shinqiti and resettling in Atar.⁸³

Equally important is a potential legacy of concubinage in terms of trading in on the family connections Islamic law provided for through this institution. The above situations suggest how that worked. Fatma’s Awlad

⁸² Unfortunately, these, like most such cases, cannot be probed back into the family itself. One of the important reasons to identify (where possible) mistresses’ relations and gender-specific accounts with respect to (female) slaves is to try and get some general idea of how these relationships may have worked.

⁸³ McDougall, unpublished paper presented Dalhousie University, 2015. The ‘special relationship’ continued: in the early 1920s, Hamody was extending loans to the Emir’s mother (McDougall, “‘A topsy-turvy world’”, p. 380).

Bou Sba relationship was clearly passed on to both her daughter and son. Hamody drew on that heritage to the point where he was appointed by the French as local Awlad Bou Sba chief in Atar; his commercial wealth was entirely owed to Awlad Bou Sba networks. Faytma benefited from her Barka family connection in setting up her bread-baking business in Tindouf; while not explicit, it is likely that the family connection assisted in her purchase of land and house building, especially as the latter occurred while she was working in Agadir. Faïda's role in the community after she left Bi Kaje's household was still clearly related to that relationship. In terms of her activities, her subsequent marriage and even her long-term house mate (the Aunt's cook), were both 'hold-overs' from her in-house position as concubine. 'Islam says' that post-slavery relations imply an ongoing responsibility by former masters to former slaves.⁸⁴ What that responsibility translated into in any given situation varied.⁸⁵ But as Baba said, former slaves and children of slaves were kin; therefore, that range of responsibilities varied according to perceived need.

That notion of 'kin' as embedded in Islamic manumission also articulated itself in 'slave-slave' relationships. Cooper did not explore this aspect of 'Islamic slavery'—or more importantly, Islamic freedom. Faytma also spoke of her ongoing relationship with a former Barka slave, Messoud, the one she says was freed because of his bravery in the Desert Crossing. The nature of their relationship both within the household and after Barka's death remains unclear. What is clear is that he remained important in Faytma's life and was part of her son's marriage—it was all a matter of 'family', as she put it.⁸⁶ Bi Kaje's story of how her freed Aunt's cook ended up living with Faïda is even more revealing of the largely invisible, personal

⁸⁴ 'Wala'. See footnote #17.

⁸⁵ On this subject, Cooper himself produced early research: *From Slaves to Squatters: Plantation Labour and Agriculture in Zanzibar and Coastal Kenya 1890–1925* (Yale University Press, 1980). More recently, Elisabeth McMahon, *Slavery and Emancipation in Islamic East Africa: From Honor to Respectability* (Oxford University Press, 2015), which also draws on the biography of a former female slave as a rich source of evidence for local (Pemba) society. Or for West Africa, Benedetta Rossi (Ed.), *Reconfiguring Slavery: West African Trajectories* (Liverpool University Press, 2009) and *Slavery and Emancipation in Twentieth-Century Africa* (Cambridge University Press, 2016). Studies of 'post-slavery' societies are flourishing; for an introduction, see Eric Hahonou and Baz Lecocq (Eds), "Exploring Post-Slavery in Contemporary Africa", special issue *International Journal of African Historical Studies* (May, 2015).

⁸⁶ McDougall, "A Sense of Self", pp. 287, 8; 297–302.

networks that formed among female slaves, freed slaves and *umm al-walad* but may also have been there at some level among males, which we have not yet explored.

Similarly, the stories of the three girls revealed important inter-familial relations following on from Minata and Fatma, and, in turn, Fatma's special relationship with the Emir of the Adrar, which ultimately created new identifiable 'Ahel' (families): the Ahel Hamody and the Ahel Dene. What is particularly significant in this case is the fact that while the families carry the names of Fatma's *bratani* child and Minata's *bratani* husband (respectively), the families see themselves as *related through the sisters*. Indeed, I became aware of the Ahel Dene when Zekaria Ahmed Salem Dene approached me years ago with the greeting "you've written about my family", by which he meant I had written about Hamody. He, and subsequently his father, introduced me to the larger history of 'the Family', one which defines itself not through Hamody and Dene per se but rather through two young, enslaved sisters whose relationship to each other and lived experiences as *umm al-walad* are seen as foundational ties between their descendants even today.⁸⁷ The contradiction between patriarchal, traditional Islam and defining genealogy through female *umm al-walads* did not seem to pose a problem for anyone I interviewed. While I do not mean to suggest that this is necessarily common, I do think it likely that concubinage created ongoing familial relations that we simply do not 'see' because we do not understand them or how they are articulated. Or because they are truly embedded in 'family'. Recent research in Mauritania argues strongly for this approach, but it remains yet to be explored.⁸⁸

⁸⁷ I am grateful to Zakeria for seeking me out those many years ago at an African Studies Association meeting and for arranging to have his wonderful brother Zein work as my assistant in Dec. 2004–Jan. 2005. I am equally appreciative of the hospitality of their family (mother, sister and father) in Atar and the information provided by Mohamed Salem ould Denne (great-grandson of Minata, paternal side; interview Atar Jan. 2004).

⁸⁸ From a Social Sciences and Humanities Council of Canada grant (2008–12). Some work drawing on this research supports a discussion of concubinage as forced marriage in E. Ann McDougall, "Concubinage as Forced Marriage? Colonial *jawari*, contemporary *hartaniyya* and marriage in Mauritania", in Annie Bunting, B. N. Lawrance, R. Roberts (Eds.), *Marriage by Force? Contestation over Consent and Coercion in Africa* (Ohio University Press, 2016): 159–177.

PART IV: EPILOGUE—THE ‘ISLAMIC LEGACIES’ OF SLAVERY IN (ONE) CONTEMPORARY MUSLIM SOCIETY

Above we have been speaking across time and place, attempting to draw from specific situations information that is more broadly relevant to the questions central to this collection. As a last comment, I would note that the recent project on *haratine* in Mauritania (cited several times above)⁸⁹ clearly shows how embedded the legacy of long-term concubinage remains. In abolishing slavery in 1980, the government was also abolishing the legal basis connecting many Mauritanian families. That some aspects of ‘slavery’ persist is not only a story of continued exploitation, it is as one informant put it, ‘a story of defending my brothers’.

He explained that because it was custom in his family, much as it was in Bi Kaje’s, to ‘marry-off’ a former *umm al-walad* to a *bratani*:

[C]hildren of the master become the maternal brothers of *haratine* ... I know people who have half-brothers who are *haratine* and they are very attached to their brothers and half-brothers. This creates a lot of psychological pressure because they always regard their brothers as free.... They say: you cannot take my brothers as slaves; you must respect my brothers. This is a daily battle.⁹⁰

Another informant echoed aspects of Fatma’s and Minata’s legacy in recounting how his family traces their origins to the tribe of their grandmother’s former master. She had been *umm al-walad*, then freed and married to a *bratani* from a different tribe. Our informant explained that the former master had ‘adopted’ the *bratani* son of his former *umm al-walad* (our informant’s father) and that in appreciation, the family continues (to this day) to identify through their slave grandmother rather than through the *bratani* parentage of their grandfather.⁹¹

Finally, the project we were conducting was on *haratine*. As we began an interview with a fifty-something informant generally known as being

⁸⁹ McDougall (Ed.) *Invisible People* (Editions Karthala, forthcoming).

⁹⁰ M’Barakould Beyrouk, quoted in McDougall “Concubinage as Forced Marriage?”, pp. 166, 7. (He is a well-known writer, a public figure; hence his interview is not anonymous.)

⁹¹ Ibid., pp. 165, 6. Unfortunately, we did not push the question of ‘adoption’ further, so I cannot state with any assurance as to whether there was a milk-kin relationship established or not.

bratani, the first thing he told us was the story of his mother who had been *jariya* (concubine) when he was born. This was to make it clear to us that he was *not* in fact *bratani*, but free-born.⁹² The necessity of claiming a slave ancestry in order to prove a free status speaks volumes about the contemporary complexities of slavery's legacy.

⁹² Ibid., p. 171.



CHAPTER 3

Reading the Hidden History of the Cape: Islam and Slavery in the Making of Race and Sex in South Africa

Gabeba Baderoon

Islam poses a paradox in South Africa. Today, Muslims form an integral part of the post-apartheid nation and are visibly represented in politics, education, business, the media and the arts, even though they make up less than two percent of the country's population (Tayob 2002: 20). Despite this significant public profile, the history of Islam in the country is not widely known, and Muslims are often portrayed in circumscribed ways in South African popular culture. The paradox of being disproportionately visible yet strangely overlooked gives Islam an *ambiguous visibility*. The form of such visibility is also distinctive. In images of weddings, feasts, funerals and pilgrimage, Muslims have been staged since the eighteenth century as marginal and exotic, yet paradoxically also *necessary* figures in the colonial and, later, the national imaginary. South African cookbooks, popular histories, cartoons, travel materials and news stories often feature picturesque and

G. Baderoon (✉)

Women's, Gender and Sexuality Studies and African Studies, Pennsylvania State University and English Department, Stellenbosch University, University Park, PA, USA

e-mail: gxb26@psu.edu

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tranquil Muslim figures. However, Islam is also associated with anxieties around coded and occult practices, reflected in long-held beliefs in Muslim women's ability to "gool" (use magic powers), and the tendency of Muslim men toward sudden violence, or "running amok". This conception of Muslims as alternately benign and threatening resonates in some ways with international conventions for portraying Islam, but the pattern in South Africa has distinctive features.

In this chapter I show how the portrayal of Muslims as placid and marginal has served a crucial rhetorical function in South Africa and argue that it is not possible to fully understand enduring concepts of race, sexuality and belonging in the country today without attending to the crucible of colonialism, slavery and Islam in which they were formed.

South Africa's history is viewed largely through the prism of apartheid, the devastating system of legislated racial discrimination that operated from 1948 to 1994. The impact of slavery has receded behind these crucial and more recent traumas. Consequently, the colonial period is seen as "a mere prologue to the more interesting and more important and dramatic forging of a modern capitalist economy" (Worden and Crais 1994: 2). Given that the Cape was colonized two centuries before the northern part of South Africa, a period during which slavery shaped all social and economic relations, it is hard to overstate the importance of the institution of slavery for shaping the colonial and, later, the apartheid history of the country (Worden 1985: 4).

I revisit the role of Muslims in the formation of the country's racial and sexual codes during the colonial period in South Africa, a traumatic beginning that is often overwritten by other narratives. To do so does not question the significance of apartheid; rather, I attempt to articulate the latter's crucial continuities with the colonial period. I show that in addition to land displacement, war and the genocide of the Khoisan, the country was fundamentally shaped by the convergence of slavery and Islam.

SLAVERY AS A STARTING POINT

Slavery and Islam are intricately connected in South Africa. Muslims first arrived in the Cape Colony in 1658 as slaves and free servants (known as "Free Blacks") of the Dutch, only six years after the Colony's founding. This makes slavery and the arrival of Muslims coterminous with the beginning of colonial settlement in South Africa. However, slavery is not just the temporal starting point for this study. The historian Nigel Worden points out that slavery shaped all social relations in the Cape Colony and

its hinterland; for significant periods between 1658 and emancipation in 1834, slaves in fact formed the majority of the population of the Cape Colony (Worden 1985: 4; Dooling 2007: 7).

Islam therefore arrived in South Africa in the context of colonial settlement and slavery. In 1652, the Dutch East India Company (Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie, or VOC) established a refueling station at the Cape to serve its trade in spices from Asia. Importantly, the Cape also marked a crucial point on the slave route from East Africa to the Americas (Da Costa and Davids 1994: 3). Unlike colonies in the New World, the Cape settlement was not initially aimed at colonial expansion; its purpose was solely to provision ships engaged in the Dutch shipping routes to the East (Worden 1994: 9). However, the activities of the Dutch soon encroached on the land of the Khoi and San, the indigenous people of the Cape, who resisted the latter's attempts to conscript them as labor for the Company. Because the VOC forbade the *enslavement* of indigenous people, the Company resorted to the use of imported slave labor, and enslaved people were brought to the Cape at first from West Africa and subsequently from territories around the Indian Ocean (Worden 1985: 7).

The first Muslims to arrive at the Cape in 1658 were the Mardykckers of Amboya in the East Indies, who were brought as soldiers to support the Dutch in the face of Khoisan resistance (Tayob 1999: 22). However, it was as slaves that the vast majority of Muslims were brought to the colony. Initially, the VOC acquired slaves from the Dutch West India Company, which was deeply involved in the slave trade to the Americas. The majority of enslaved people were brought to the Cape Colony from the Indian Ocean region, including from East Africa, the African islands of the Indian Ocean and South and South-east Asia (Worden 1985: 8). The Dutch exploited nodes of an existing slave trade established by the Portuguese, and people were captured as slaves in Mozambique, Madagascar, India and territories in South-east Asia to be brought to the Cape (Bradlow and Cairns 1978; Botha 1969 [1928]). Over the course of almost two centuries of slave-holding society at the Cape, the enslaved population came to number more than 60,000 people (Ross 1999: 6).

Islam was the religion of a significant proportion of enslaved people at the Cape and, in addition, there was a high rate of conversion to Islam among indigenous people, who were subject to conditions as brutal to slavery (Bradlow and Cairns 1978). According to Worden, Islam offered enslaved people "a degree of independent slave culture" separate from that of slave-owners (Worden 1985: 4). Andrew Bank finds that slaves created spaces outside of the paternalistic slave household in which to exercise

agency, including through the practice of Islam (1995: 184). For instance, “ratiep”, a ritual piercing of the skin by adepts who appeared to feel no pain, could be read as “an active expression of control over the body through denial of physical pain” (Bank 1995: 184). Even more powerfully, “ratiep” could be seen as a coded “rejection of their owners’ claims over their bodies” (Mason quoted in Bank 1995: 184). Islam and slavery were so intimately connected in this period that the word “Malay”, which refers to the lingua franca of Bahasa Melayu spoken by enslaved people at the Cape, who had come from different territories around the Indian Ocean, eventually became the word for “Muslim” at the Cape. I discuss this further below in the section on “Islam and Race”. As the history of the term “Malay” shows, slavery remains central to the meanings that Islam holds even in contemporary South Africa.

During the period of Dutch control at the Cape, enslaved people were owned by the VOC, with some the private property of free burghers. In addition, there was a small number of “Free Blacks” in the Cape, who were either manumitted slaves or people who had arrived as free servants from Batavia, the VOC headquarters in Asia (Worden et al. 1998: 64). Included among Muslims brought to the Cape were leaders exiled from South-east Asia, where their role in driving resistance had proved an obstacle to Dutch trade and colonial expansion. Among these leaders was Sheikh Yusuf, who arrived in the Cape in 1694. Exiled leaders such as Sheikh Yusuf were isolated in remote areas outside Cape Town to reduce the risk of their influencing Muslim slaves. Despite this, according to oral tradition, these figures became beacons for runaway slaves, and “the memory of these political exiles and prominent personalities became an important part of Muslim religious consciousness and practices” (Tayob 1999: 23).

Abdulkader Tayob points out that 1694 was the date chosen by local organizers to mark the 300th anniversary of Islam in South Africa, rather than the date of the earlier arrival of the Mardyckers, a sign of the complexity of the place of Islam in South Africa. The history of Muslims in South Africa includes both resistance to colonialism and the recruitment of Muslims to enforce colonial rule (Tayob 1999: 23). While the vast majority of Muslims were brought to the Cape as slaves, the Mardyckers arrived as soldiers to support the Dutch against Khoisan resistance. According to Tayob, the mass celebrations of the tri-centenary anniversary were “a significant indication of how Shaykh Yusuf had been adopted as a symbol of Muslim presence in the country and Islamic resistance to colonialism and apartheid” (1999: 23). The earlier presence of the Mardyckers,

on the other hand, signaled a more ambiguous role, in which complex local politics in Batavia led to both resistance to Dutch settlement and collaboration with it.

The way in which slavery has been remembered in South Africa is a crucial subject, addressed in Pumla Gqola's ground-breaking study *What Is Slavery To Me? Postcolonial/Slave Memory in Post-Apartheid South Africa* (2010). Gqola gives nuanced attention to the shifting meanings of memories of slavery and their articulations with race and sexuality in the post-apartheid period. Studies of South African history written before 1980 assumed that the role of slavery in the Cape was minor and its character relatively "mild" (Keegan 1996: 16). A range of popular texts from cookbooks to landscape paintings also reflected this benign and even picturesque view of the colony's system of forced labor. It was only in the 1980s that revisionist scholarship on slavery in South Africa countered these assumptions and demonstrated that slave labor was in fact central to both the economy and the culture of the Cape Colony (Worden 1985: 7). Because of the high proportion of male slaves to male colonists, colonial society at the Cape had an intense fear of slave resistance; consequently, slaves were disciplined through "the massive use of judicial force" (Ross 1983: 2). Enslaved people owned by private burghers were subjected to "violent and extreme" punishments (Worden 1985: 4).

Extreme violence, including systemic sexual violence, became the norm under slavery. Enslaved women were subjected to sexual slavery, since the Slave Lodge, which housed enslaved people owned by the Dutch East India Company, was also the "main brothel" of Cape Town (Keegan 1996: 20). Today, the Slave Lodge is the national museum for memorializing slavery. The slave-holding period is thus the primal scene for understanding the evolution of racial and sexual codes in South Africa, and a lack of attention to slavery prevents a full understanding of a foundational time in South African history. The historian Robert Ross writes that "throughout the 180 years of slavery at the Cape, not a single man, slave or free, was convicted for raping a slave woman" (1983: 114). The scale of such sexual violence is part of the reason that South Africa continues to experience epidemic levels of sexual violence today. It is particularly notable that a system characterized by the exercise of brutal control and widespread sexual violence was portrayed popular culture and even some historical studies as mild and picturesque.

Historical records show that colonists had a compulsive anxiety about slave rebellion, poisoning and theft, though the most common forms of slave resistance were escape and flight (Dooling 2007: 12). Nonetheless,

insurrection remained a “paranoic fear” among Cape slave-owners and, as a result, they often used brutal displays of violence as a disciplining mechanism (Hall 2000: 24). In 1754, a slave code based on the Batavian model (also known as the Statutes of India) was instituted in the Cape Colony to control the perceived dangers posed by the slave population (Worden et al. 1998: 60). In an attempt to “curb plots”, the code stipulated the numbers of slaves who could gather together. Slaves were also required to carry “passes” signed by their masters to enter the town or ascend Table Mountain (Worden et al. 1998: 60). This means of surveillance and control over the movement of black people later became the basis of Pass laws that constricted mobility in the apartheid era, when all black men (and later, black women) were required to carry passes in one of the most intrusive and destructive elements of the apartheid system.

To the colonial gaze, the sight of large numbers of black people thus evoked the unsettling trope of slave rebellion. Such anxieties helped to shape not only social relations, but the built environment of the colony. John Mason confirms that slaves at the Cape were subjected to “almost constant surveillance” (2003: 110) and kept “within the reach of their masters’ and mistresses’ eyes, tongues, and hands” (2003: 108). In an “archaeology of absences” conducted into the colonial Cape, Martin Hall showed that the intimate presence of slaves and Khoisan serfs shaped the architecture of colonial-era farms and the city. The fear of arson by runaway slaves influenced both the built and natural environment on farms, including the placement not only of houses and slave quarters but also trees, rocks and crops (Hall 2000: 198). The landscape of the Cape was thus marked by the anxiety generated by the presence of enslaved people.

Prior to 1804, the practice of Islam was severely constrained under the Batavian Code, although the Dutch eventually tacitly tolerated Muslim practices. Many burghers encouraged the conversion of their slaves to Islam, as the law of matrilineal descent allowed the enslavement of children of Muslim slaves, but not Christian ones (Shell 1997: 272). Slave-owners also believed that Muslim slaves were more reliable and “less unruly” due to Islam’s prohibition on the consumption of alcohol (Ross 1983: 17). Nevertheless, precisely because Islam offered enslaved people the possibility of an interior life and a communal space outside of the control of slave-owners, the observance of the religion was regarded with ambivalence by the Dutch, and the public practice of Muslim rituals was punishable by death (Theal 1905: 1–2). In this context, Islam survived through hidden practices that shaped communal relations, language and

food rituals that survive among descendants of slaves and in the broader South African culture even today. The nature of the relation between internal practices and their larger meaning is of particular interest in my argument.

According to Tayob, despite the constrictions that Muslims faced during the colonial period, they developed institutions such as the first school for black people in South Africa, established in 1793 (1999: 28); the first mosque, the Awwal mosque, in 1798 (24); and the first written texts in Afrikaans, using Arabic script, in 1856 (28). With this history of deeply coded rituals, and because of the conventional tradition of representing slavery at the Cape in a picturesque way, representations of Islam in the colonial context must be read critically. The hidden nature of Islamic observance changed in 1804 when the Dutch colonial authorities, seeking the support of Muslims in the face of an impending British invasion, granted them freedom of religion for the first time.

In the dominant picturesque mode seen in landscape paintings in the nineteenth century, the violence of the slave-holding Cape Colony was rendered into a pleasing and domesticated view. In contrast to indigenous people, who resisted forced labor and were consequently decried by settlers as “idle” and “volatile”, “Malay” slaves were portrayed in colonial-era paintings as skilled, reliable and compliant, while also mysterious and exotic (Coetzee 1988: 28). An over-determined visibility of Islam through which Muslims were represented as complicit with the desires of white colonists became crucial to the portrayal of a pleasing colonial cityscape. The picturesque tradition led to a heightened but ambiguous visibility for Islam in the Cape, and lingered into the mid-twentieth century. In my book, *Regarding Muslims: from Slavery to Post-apartheid*, I trace the constricted pattern of images of Muslims that arose during the colonial and apartheid eras, and show the development of an increasingly complex view of Islam in the post-apartheid period.

ISLAM AND RACE

Islam has a complex history of race in South Africa. The Muslim community at the Cape developed its character and practices under conditions of enslavement, colonial rule and the fraught post-emancipation period. Islam became a refuge for enslaved people brought to the Cape from East Africa, India and South-east Asia as well as for indigenous Khoi and San people, who consequently formed a creole slave and indigenous Muslim community at the Cape. The ability of this community to absorb

people of different origins has left a legacy of racial indeterminability in the South African meaning of the word “Muslim”. However, this inclusive history was subsequently overwritten by the racializing imperatives of Dutch and British imperialism and, later, apartheid—during which Muslims became subject to shifting discourses of race.

The enslaved people brought by the Dutch to the Cape became known as “Malays”; and even today, the descendants of slaves at the Cape are often called (and name themselves) “Cape Malays”. While this suggests a geographical origin in Malaysia, the term instead has a more complex set of connotations. Enslaved people at the Cape were brought from several territories around the Indian Ocean, including Mozambique, Madagascar, India and South-east Asia, and spoke a variety of African and Asian languages (Shell 1994: xxv). Bahasa Melayu was a lingua franca in the Indian Ocean region, and also became a common language among slaves in the Cape. Several strands of meaning therefore converge in the eventual use in the Cape Colony of the word “Malay” for Muslim. As Kerry Ward points out, “[a]t the Cape, the term Malay could mean Muslim, or could refer to a linguistic group, or could be a geographical designation of place of origin. It was only by the end of the VOC period that the term Malay began to lose its direct link to forced migration and became more exclusively tied to the fact of being Muslim” (2012: 86). Derived from the use of Bahasa Melayu and eventually coming to mean “Muslim”, the term “Malay” is also shadowed by the history of enforced migration and enslavement.

The terms “slave”, “Free Black” and “Malay” (Muslim) thus introduced a critical racial instability into South Africa, which was carried in the post-emancipation period by the label “Coloured”, which was the name given to emancipated slaves. Due to Islam’s racial heterogeneity as a result of sexual violence under slavery and the encouragement of conversion, being Muslim could include enslaved, free, black, slave-owner, burger, white, Coloured, Dutch, British, indigenous, African, Asian and European people. The question “who is Muslim in South Africa?” thus carries with it a founding (and confounding) racial puzzle.

The use of the word “Malay” for Muslim during the colonial period is distinct from its use under apartheid as the racial category “Cape Malay” or “Malay”. In this paper, I use the term “Malay” for Muslim in its historical context, specifically alluding to the relation of slavery to Islam. I do not intend to connote its contemporary meanings, which are primarily derived from the place of “Malay” within the apartheid racial category of “Colouredness”, and which is consequently used to distinguish between “Indian” and “Malay” Muslims. In addition, I do not intend my use of the

historical term “Malay” (which included people from East Africa, India and South-east Asia) to suggest that the people known as “Cape Malays” in contemporary parlance are the exemplary Muslims in South Africa, nor that the Western Cape, the home of most people who were categorized as “Cape Malay” under apartheid, is the representative space of Islam in South Africa. I do show, however, that the Western Cape province, which covers most of the historical territory of the Cape Colony, was the locus of colonial slavery and (not coincidentally) is the province where most, but not all, Muslims in South Africa live. Unreflective extrapolation from the Cape to the whole of South Africa is a legitimate concern, and overwrites the different regional histories of Islam. On the other hand, I find an equal danger in regarding the Cape as exceptional and marginal, which has resulted in the neglect of slavery in conceptions of broader South African history. This risks transforming slavery and the genocide of the Khoisan into minority topics, viewed as not authentically “African” or “South African” enough, and as a superficial distraction from the African majority. Rather, I argue that the current racialization of Islam is a *consequence* of the colonial period, and the fact that South Africa’s experience of slavery is characterized by specificity is simply one more reason to address its complexities. A picturesque view of slavery and Islam, which constituted a sense of exceptionalism and exoticism about Muslim slaves, has helped to mute public understanding of the role of the crucial phenomenon of slavery in constituting the politics of race and sex in contemporary South Africa.

Slavery in the Cape was abolished in 1834 under British rule. Vivian Bickford-Smith shows that in the post-emancipation period, factors such as economic hardship, the impact of white exclusion, and laws such as the Liquor Act combined to undercut the development of a unified black identity in Cape Town, and instead encouraged separate “Malay”, Coloured and African identities (1995). Before emancipation, Black Capetonians were legally divided into enslaved and enserved people, but nonetheless found grounds for connections under similar conditions of labor, oppression and violence (Jeppie 2001: 83). However, Shamil Jeppie notes that post-emancipation official discourses about religion overrode such relations, and “all the evidence of creolisation, ethnic interaction, cultural exchange between the slaves, and newly-forged identities in the setting of the slave society of urban Cape Town was rejected” (2001: 84). Instead, a sense of ontological differences among blacks was encouraged. As a consequence, despite extensive relations during enslavement, the use of religion as a mechanism of racial division in the period after emancipation

led to a sense of immutable difference between “Muslims-as-Malay” and “Christians-as-Coloured” (Jeppie 2001: 83). *Images* of “Malays” played a significant role in the constitution of such differences. In the course of the nineteenth century, “Malays” were increasingly portrayed as quaint, enigmatic and distinct from others (Jeppie 1988: 8). Robert Ross confirms that from the mid-nineteenth century, popular portrayals featured “the growing image of the ‘Malays’ ... as mysterious and exotic” (1999: 140).

The construction of separate racialized religious identities in the nineteenth century was followed in the twentieth century by the “reinvention” of Islam along racial lines, particularly in the Cape, a project to which the work of the Afrikaans linguist and folklorist I. D. du Plessis was central (Jeppie 1988: 8). In his popular book *The Cape Malays* (1972), du Plessis articulated a racial theory of the “Malays” which he extrapolated from descriptions of the body to the mind to the constitution of a “Malay” race. This theory was given a sense of historical depth through the use of picturesque nineteenth-century images of “Malays” from George French Angas’s *The Kafirs Illustrated* (1849). Far from simply purveying a harmless romanticism, du Plessis’s work disrupted the furthering of a broader black identity and helped to “fragment the development of autonomous political movements among the coloureds” (Jeppie 2001: 88). The ethnicizing and racializing of Islam that had started in the immediate post-emancipation period continued into the mid-twentieth century but ultimately foundered in the face of the racial instability of the term “Malay”. Nonetheless, the project to racialize Islam has had lastingly damaging effects.

Because of this history, the topic of Islam and race cannot be approached in a solipsistic manner. To make this argument does not mean one can ignore the fact that the lives of Muslims in South Africa are crucially influenced by race. Abdulkader Tayob points out that race significantly shapes the experience of being Muslim in South Africa. Islam is frequently assumed to supersede the influence of class, language, ethnicity and history—as though Muslims are somehow exempted from such factors. Erasing attention to specificity and variation among Muslims creates the erroneous perception of a singular Muslim community. Instead, as Tayob notes, “Muslims in the various racial categories of apartheid South Africa experience Islam in very different ways” (Tayob 2002: 20).

The racialization of Muslims as “Coloured”, “Indian” or “Cape Malay” has had the effect of transforming slavery, which was the dominant social force in colonial South Africa for 176 years, into a minority, and therefore minor, subject. Cast as a “Malay” or, at most, a “Coloured” issue, slavery

has been seen as exceptional to broader South African history. In a historic injustice, this “minor” status gives to slavery connotations of pathos or exoticism and diminishes its general and national significance even further. As a result, slavery has been seen as part of a distant and picturesque past that turns slaves into exotic and “timeless” people, rather than “the first modern people” of southern Africa (C. L. R. James cited in Hofmeyr 2007: 5). In addition to misrepresenting a crucial part of the country’s history, this poses the risk that people classified after emancipation as “Coloured” are not fully included in the national South African narrative, which can generate self-ethnicizing and further fracture. In fact, South Africa has a uniquely inclusive history of Islam—and an informed debate would embrace the complexities of this beginning. Historically, one third of those labeled “Malay” had East African origins; another third came from South Asia, and the last third from Indonesia and Malaya. To retrospectively assign a race to Muslims is to accede to apartheid’s fantasy of racial separateness. The danger of minoritizing slavery and ethnicizing Islam is that it undermines a general and critically important history.

The most important reason for the neglect of slavery in conceptions of South African history and national culture is the trivializing effect of the picturesque mode, an aesthetic tradition that has ensured that the brutal system of slavery at the Cape continues to be seen as “mild” and confers a benign beginning to colonial settlement in South Africa. Images of Muslims play a crucial role in this picturesque tradition. Thanks to the prevalence of the image of the submissive “Malay” slave in the visual tradition in South Africa, enslaved people have been envisioned as figures of exoticism or pathos, abstracted from history, and functioning solely to add depth and distinctiveness to white subjectivity. The power of these colonial-era discourses is still evident today, aided by the myth of an “empty land”, which denied the presence of indigenous people before colonial settlement. It is a major aim of my argument to critique the effects of the picturesque mode and demonstrate the necessity of reading slavery differently.

CONCLUSION

For 176 years, slavery was the central form of social and economic organization in the territories that would form South Africa. In this chapter I have examined why the foundational role of slavery in generating South African notions of race and sex has become forgotten, even among people

who are descended from slaves, like me. As the novelist and literary scholar Zoë Wicomb has argued, this forgetting is the effect of the deep psychic costs of almost two centuries of extreme violence, and the further violence of being blamed for inviting that brutality. This has resulted in a phenomenon she unforgettably called a “folk amnesia” born of “shame” (1998: 100).

But such erasure is also the consequence of a sustained system of propaganda that labeled slavery as “mild” and of minor significance in South African history (Keegan 1996: 16), a benign view also reflected in popular culture through texts such as cookbooks, cartoons and landscape paintings. The legacy of slavery still permeates South Africa today. Wicomb’s notion of shame shows how powerfully emotion causes us to veer away from grappling with slavery’s impact. Yet, to recall slavery beyond the veil of “shame” would allow us to understand the continuing prevalence of sexual violence against Black women, and to the normality ascribed to Black suffering generally—the ground on which apartheid was built. The imprint of slavery is evident today in forms of labor that are crucial yet continue to be undervalued, underpaid and characterized by systemic violence, such as farm labor and domestic labor, since the pattern of appropriation of people’s bodies and labor was replaced by other forms of exclusion after emancipation.

And yet of course to remember slavery is not only to remember pain but also enslaved people’s “modernity” (C. L. R. James cited in Hofmeyr 2007: 5)—their creation of new cultures, their inventive evasions of official strictures and categories, their remaking of received practices and their splicing of language, food, music and beliefs in ways that would eventually come to shape post-emancipatory national culture as a whole. It is necessary to remember slavery to be able to attend to the forms of survival, inventiveness and flourishing among the descendants of slavery, even while we attend to the inter-generational effects of systemic violence and the internal and external signs of pain that it produces. As in other parts of the world, South Africa’s history of slavery continues to shape the present in profound ways.

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CHAPTER 4

French and English Orientalisms and the Study of Slavery and Abolition in North Africa and the Middle East: What Are the Connections?

Diane Robinson-Dunn

The central concerns of this colloquium are rooted in two fields of scholarship: the study of slavery, the slave trade and abolition on one hand and Orientalism or the representation of the Middle East, Islam and the Arab world by Westerners, particularly the British and the French, on the other. Each field has grown and developed along its own trajectory over the course of the last three decades. However, rarely are the two studies considered in conjunction with each other, despite the obvious areas of overlap between them. After all production of and interest in Orientalist images, in the form of travel narratives and literature as well as art, flourished during the same time that governments and private citizens in both countries began to take an interest in female or harem-oriented slavery as

D. Robinson-Dunn (✉)
University of Detroit Mercy, Detroit, MI, USA
e-mail: robinsod@udmercy.edu

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practiced in North Africa and the Middle East.¹ This new concern developed, in part, as an extension of a transatlantic abolitionist movement. It also resulted from British and French imperialism in these regions, beginning with exploration and economic expansion, followed by colonialism, and then finally the mandate system.

These developments in Western European politics and culture occurred during the eighteenth, nineteenth, and into the twentieth centuries, and a number of contemporaries were aware of if not actively involved in both. Yet modern scholars have tended to reify the categories of “history” and “art,” treating the story of female or harem-oriented slavery and abolition as distinct and separate from the imaginative creations of the Orientalists despite the fact that the former was often mentioned or served as theme in the latter. This approach is particularly surprising given the way that questions of culture have transformed the discipline of history within the past generation.

The economic determinism of the Marxist historians of the 1950s and 1960s has given way to an understanding of class, and related concepts, not as rigid structures but rather as fluid, cultural creations informing historical processes as they change continually in the course of a myriad of human relationships. We know that meaningless action does not occur, and that individuals who are unable to make what they do understandable to others risk marginalization, at the very least. Because meaning is as important to survival as other more concrete or material needs, historians must consider every piece of evidence from the past, from visual images and literature to laws and treaties, as both invented for particular circumstances as well as found in the larger culture. The ideological systems, which serve as a repertoire for the construction of identities such as race, ethnicity, gender, and empire, are themselves fictions. As Benedict Anderson famously explained, the nation is necessarily imagined, as no one person can possibly know everyone in it.² Even the concept of class, which seemed to be on the verge of extinction as it became clear that historical actors frequently behaved in ways contrary to purely economic

¹ Here I differentiate between North Africa and the rest of the continent in part because of the ways in which this region can be considered an extension of the Arab and Islamic world and in part because of my own previous research through which it became clear that while slavery may have been male-dominated in the Sudan, once the traveler of the late nineteenth century moved northwards into Egypt and towards the Mediterranean, the trade and practice of slavery became harem-oriented and harem-driven, with the vast majority of slaves being women, children and eunuchs.

² Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, London, Verso, 1983, 15.

interests, was given new life by scholars such as Louis Althusser and E.P. Thompson who re-conceptualized it in terms of the ideologies that inform human interaction.³

These developments in the discipline of history have, not surprisingly, had an impact on the study of slavery, particularly in the past twenty years. During that time scholars have become more interested in analyzing the production of culture and meaning within slave societies, surrounding that trade and informing abolitionism than in the debates of the previous generation regarding issues such as profit and loss or the compatibility of slavery with capitalism. In 1998, the same year of Ehud Toledano's groundbreaking book on that topic with regard to the Ottoman Middle East, an international colloquium of francophone scholars gathered in Montpellier to commemorate the 150th anniversary of emancipation in the French colonies and to discuss the study of slavery from a cultural as well as historical perspective. They employed techniques associated with literary theory to materials ranging from oral traditions and memoirs, to abolitionist and anti-abolitionist lectures, to the gothic novel.⁴

In addition to literary analysis, methods borrowed from anthropology and ethnography further enrich our understanding of historical sources, and Olivier Pétré-Grenouilleau has written of the need to employ techniques from these disciplines in order to explore new frontiers in the global history of slavery and thus to shed light on that institution's role in the societies and cultures of the Middle East and African interior, as well as those of the Atlantic world.⁵ Such approaches are especially important when we consider the limits not only of Western perspectives, but even of Western languages. For most do not have the terms to describe, for example, the subtle differences and culturally bound nuances associated with the status and social position of the various members, slave and free, of the Muslim household in this part of the world, whose kinships ties were not necessarily based on blood relations.⁶

³ Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," *Lenin and Philosophy*, Monthly Review Press, 1971, and E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, London, Gollancz, 1963.

⁴ Ehud Toledano, *Slavery and Abolition in the Ottoman Middle East*, Seattle, University of Washington Press, 1998, and Marie-Christine Rochmann, *Esclavage et Abolitions*, Karthala, Paris, 2000.

⁵ *Les Traites négrières*, Paris, Gallimard, 2004.

⁶ Dror Ze'evi, "My slave" and Toledano, "The concept of slavery" in *Slave Elites in the Middle East and Africa*, Toru and Philips (dir), London, Kegan Paul, 2000.

In the years following these calls for new directions in historical research, significant progress has been made in the field with regard to both the study of slavery as practiced in Africa and the Middle East and the sophistication of techniques used to shed light on questions of culture. For example, Mohammed Ennaji has examined the inequalities and mechanisms of social control that informed power relationships in the Arab world on multiple levels, from God to man, king to subject, man to woman and master to slave, all prior to Western expansion in the region.⁷ Similarly, Roger Botte has shed light on indigenous hierarchies and traditional sources of authority by considering the perspectives of Muslims who opposed abolition from Morocco to Saudi Arabia.⁸ In addition, we are now seeing studies of slavery, which employ the techniques associated with postcolonial scholars, such as Homi Bhabha and Paul Gilroy, and understand modernity as characterized by fluid and hybridized identities within global cultural systems.⁹

Yet for all of these new developments that have been made in understanding the cultural issues surrounding slavery and abolition in Africa and the Middle East, there are aspects of this field in need of further exploration. One of the most important is the relationship between Orientalism and gender in the context of abolitionism and among supporters of the anti-slavery cause. I use the term Orientalism to describe Western, usually British and French, representations of Arabs and Muslims, particularly those that depict the harem or slavery and serve to project alterity in an imperial context. For if slavery was as much a part of the fabric of Arab societies as Ennaji has argued and opposed by religious leaders as Botte has shown, then attempts by British and French abolitionists to eradicate it in their respective territories, colonies and mandates would seem to involve a restructuring of power relationships on a grand scale. Such an endeavor must be understood, therefore, not as independent of imperialism, but rather as an expression of it.

This, however, is not to call for a resurrection of binaries posing an imperialist, abolitionist West in opposition to a colonized, slaveholding East. For such an approach would obscure the ways in which Arabs and

⁷ *Le Sujet et le mamelouk*, Paris, Mille et une Nuits, 2007.

⁸ *Esclavages et abolitions en terre d'Islam*, Versailles, André, 2010.

⁹ Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, London, Harvard UP 1993; Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, London, Routledge, 1994; and Myriam Cottias et al., *Les Traites et les esclavages*, Paris, Karthala, 2010.

Muslims have chosen to adopt certain Western ideas and practices, including Orientalist images of and beliefs about the harem slave, and integrate them into their own cultures over the course of the last three centuries.¹⁰ Along the same lines, William Clarence-Smith has noted, even if Islamic abolitionists had little to do with the initial passage of anti-slavery laws, they nevertheless “played a vital role in turning the shadow of legislation into a lived reality.”¹¹ Engaging with Muslim authorities, such as Egypt’s grand mufti Muhammad ‘Abduh,¹² who interpreted their faith in such a way so as to incorporate certain Western ideas and practices is no less legitimate than focusing on those whose understanding of that religion is based on a rejection of the West. From the perspective of the historian, one is not necessarily more Islamic than the other.

However, the relationships between gender, abolition, Orientalism and imperialism are by no means simple and straightforward, and we cannot make assumptions about any of the above without first doing the necessary research and analysis. For example, while nineteenth-century British and Foreign Anti-slavery activists were representing the harem as an evil institution responsible for the slave trade, certain French abolitionists were imagining it as nurturing and “*généralement doux*” despite the fact that both were allies in the same international movement.¹³ Given that abolitionist organizations and activists existed throughout Europe, it is necessary then to visit the various national and private archives from not only the British Isles, but France, Germany and Italy to name a few, and consider these historical sources in light of new questions with regard to gender and methodologies pioneered by scholars of postcolonial and cultural studies. Only then can the words and deeds of historical actors involved with harem slavery and its suppression be considered in relation to the contemporary Orientalist representations available in the larger culture. Certainly, this approach involves considerable effort and a num-

¹⁰ See not only Said’s seminal *Orientalism*, NY, Vintage Books, 1978, but also his later *Culture and Imperialism*, NY, Alfred Knopf, 1993, in which he speaks of modern imperialism as setting in motion a “globalized process” characterized by the “overlapping experience of Westerners and Orientals,” xx.

¹¹ William Clarence-Smith, *Islam and the Abolition of Slavery*, Oxford UP, 2006, 19.

¹² Jurist and theologian Muhammad ‘Abduh became Egypt’s Grand Mufti in 1899. According to ‘Imad Hilal, the abolition of slavery in Egypt was only possible as a result of the eventual support of the Egyptian people thanks to religious leaders such as ‘Abduh who pronounced it in the true spirit of Islam. *al-Raqi’ fi Misr*, Cairo, 1999, 386.

¹³ Jean Gochet, *La Traite des nègres*, Paris, 1891, 171.

ber of scholarly projects, but it is necessary in order for the field to develop to the extent that is the case with regard to “new world” or Atlantic world slavery.

Of course care must be taken so that Western scholars do not impose their own assumptions about race, slavery and abolition, associated with the Atlantic world and the Americas, onto the study of historical actors of the Middle East and North Africa. Avoiding this pitfall requires rereading Western sources with a critical eye and in light of the growing body of scholarship on the history and cultures of the regions in question. For example, while travel narratives can provide valuable insight, the modern scholar of Algerian slavery should be aware that Westerners who visited that country during the nineteenth century usually used the terms “black” and “slave” interchangeably with little, if any, understanding of the relationship between the workings of class and race in that particular context. As a result, an individual described as a “slave” in one such traveler’s letter or diary may very well have been one of thousands of free black Algerians, a number of whom had formed collectives and established monopolies over certain professions in the capital.¹⁴

A sensitivity to gender politics both within the anti-slavery movements and in the societies effected by them exposes some of the inherent shortcomings of abolitionist goals to liberate the harem slave by turning her into a wife or domestic servant.¹⁵ For example, as Judith Scheele has related, also with regard to French Algeria, it was possible for male slave owners to marry their female slaves just before emancipation as a way of keeping these women under their legal control and thus securing their unpaid labor indefinitely.¹⁶ Along the same lines, during my own trips to the archives I discovered that in British-occupied Egypt, slave girls who had been manumitted and placed in harems as free domestic servants found their new circumstances so similar to their old ones, that they sometimes forgot that they were no longer slaves.¹⁷ Their reaction is not

¹⁴ Judith Scheele, “Travail et liberté,” in Botte et Stella (dir), *Couleurs de l’esclavage*, Paris, Karthala, 2012, 372–3.

¹⁵ These roles were limited in the West as well. Leonore Davidoff, “Mastered for Life,” *Journal of Social History*, 1974, 406–23.

¹⁶ “Travail,” 376–7.

¹⁷ Diane Robinson-Dunn, *The Harem, Slavery and British Imperial Culture*, Manchester UP, 2006, 68. As Toledano has explained, slavery as practiced in this part of the world can best be understood as existing on a continuum rather than as a dichotomy of “slave” and “free,” *Slave Elites*, 159–175.

surprising when we consider that during that period in Egyptian history, the vast majority of both slaves and domestic servants worked in the harem, or the women and children's quarters of the Muslim home.

To clarify, when I use the word "harem" in the context of slavery and abolition from the eighteenth through the twentieth centuries, I am referring to a lived institution, a way of negotiating gender relationships, and a concept rich in meaning, although often not the same meaning, for Easterners and Westerners, Muslims and non-Muslims, and the many who did not fit neatly into one particular category or another. In the previously mentioned study of the anti-slavery campaign in Egypt, English activists defined their own gendered, national identities in relation to their understandings of the harem. While at the same time, Egyptians gradually adopted a modified version of the Western ideal of the bourgeois home to replace the Ottoman-style harem as a model for domestic social organization.¹⁸ In the harem then, we find a focal point where historical developments, such the implementation of imperial foreign policy, social reform and the restructuring of family life, intersect with Orientalist representations in art and literature. For both the idea and the institution that remained at the heart of late nineteenth-century anti-slavery debates and activities was also a European obsession, represented repeatedly in paintings, novels, poetry, travel narratives, treatises, feminist and anti-feminist tracts.

Yet despite the multiple intersections between representation, other types of political activity, and lived experience, Orientalist depictions of the harem tend to be regarded as belonging to a different category or field of study separate and distinct from the history of slavery and abolition in part because of widespread beliefs and assumptions about female labor and its relationship to race, which stem from the era of European imperialism. While white slaves were in the minority in North Africa and the Middle East, they were far more likely to be the focus of Orientalist art and literature than those who would have been considered as belonging to other racial categories. In addition, they were portrayed in such a way so as to communicate that their role in the harem was fundamentally different from that of their black counterparts. For despite the common association of slavery with work, light-skinned female figures never seem to be engaged in any type of labor; rather they sit, lounge, daydream, bathe and smoke.

¹⁸ Beth Baron, "The Making of the Egyptian Nation," in Blom, Hagemann and Hall (eds), *Gendered Nations*, Oxford, Berg, 2000, 137–58, 148–9.

One theme in this type of Orientalist art is to juxtapose white and black females, whose facial profiles as well as skin color would have signified “racial type” for contemporary viewers, for the purpose of contrast, as in Figs. 4.1 and 4.4. In these images, the white female nudes are the focus; their skin is luminous, and their bodies appear almost statuesque. The black women, on the other hand, occupy a more peripheral position in the painting and remain fully or at least partially clothed. In addition, the black woman acts as both a foil for and enabler of the white woman’s idleness by laboring or attending to her needs.

These images communicate two dramatically different versions of harem life as defined through the ideology of race: the white sexual object



Fig. 4.1 *The White Slave*, 1888 (oil on canvas), Lecomte du Nouÿ, Jean-Jules-Antoine (1842–1923)/Musée des Beaux-Arts, Nantes, France/Bridgeman Images

and the black worker. Jean Lecomte du Nouÿ's painting *The White Slave* in Fig. 4.1 provides an especially lucid example of the relationship between female slave labor and skin color as depicted in Orientalist art. While the black women, who have become strong and muscular from a life of physical toil, carry baskets of laundry and wash them by hand in a pool of water, the white slave sits idly staring into space with a cigarette dangling between her fingers and delicate swirls of smoke escaping her lips. Her soft, round body and porcelain skin testify to a leisurely existence. Even the sole of her plump foot is like a baby's in that does not exhibit even the slightest trace of roughness or use. Her state of undress reminds the viewer that the only activities required of her are sexual. Finally, her bejeweled hair and hands and the elegant meal that has been prepared for her in the bottom right-hand corner, as well as her indifference to it, indicate a life of luxury.

European Orientalist representations of the white slave of the harem have much in common with other popular conceptions of white femininity during this period. In England, contemporaries frequently considered the role to be equivalent to that of the prostitute in their own country, with activists working to eradicate "white slavery" at home and abroad simultaneously and treating both campaigns as part of the same cause.¹⁹ In addition, Orientalist images of the white harem slave are in some ways similar to the Victorian "angel in the house." For both of these fictions present an extreme view of female sexuality, from the odalisque whose entire existence, and indeed very essence, seem to stem from her sexual role to the Victorian lady who was regarded as a spiritually superior and even asexual being.

Both of these roles required seclusion or confinement to the private, domestic quarters, as the public sphere posed only dangers for them. Orientalist artists rarely depicted the white slave outside of the harem, and when they did, it was almost always in the context of shocking images of the public slave market. Slides of William Allen's painting in Fig. 4.2 were shown at abolitionist lectures and meetings throughout England during the late nineteenth century. In this work the white women appear as the epitome of Victorian femininity: one swoons, while the other assumes the position of suppliant.²⁰ In Fig. 4.3, Jean-Leon Gérôme communicates helpless resignation on the part of the slave, who has no choice but to allow her teeth to be inspected by a would-be buyer who seems to regard her as livestock. Similarly, the "angel in the house" had no place in the

¹⁹ Robinson-Dunn, 132–3.

²⁰ Robinson-Dunn, 127–8.



Fig. 4.2 Sir William Allan, *The Slave Market*, Constantinople, National Galleries of Scotland

world of business or politics, and the Victorian lady who ventured onto the city streets risked bodily harm as well as damage to her reputation and the erosion of her spiritual nature, without which she could not fulfill her primary role of exerting moral influence in the family.²¹

In their “proper” domestic spheres, however, both female types were imagined as pampered creatures, who because they were unaccustomed to and even incapable of work, physical or mental, depended upon the labor of nonwhite women. For the ideologies of race and empire had entered Victorian domestic life to such an extent, particularly in the latter part of the nineteenth century, that females who performed physical tasks, such as the maid-of-all work, often were regarded as racially different from the ladies on whom they waited.²² Indeed there is a striking resemblance between Pierre Bouchard’s depiction of the relationship between the white and black woman in his Orientalist painting *After the Bath*, in

²¹ Judith Walkowitz, *Prostitution in Victorian Society*, Cambridge UP, 1980 and *City of Dreadful Delight*, University of Chicago Press, 1992.

²² Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather*, NY, Routledge, 1995, especially chapters 2 and 3.



Fig. 4.3 Jean-Leon Gérôme, *The Slave Market*, 1866 (Image courtesy of the Clark Art Institute, Williamstown, Massachusetts, USA)

Fig. 4.4, and Adrien Tanoux's image of what appears to be a European woman and her maid by the same name in Fig. 4.5. Even the poses and positioning of the figures are similar; the primary difference being that the black attendant stands while the white one kneels. Also, in Bouchard's image we see the facial profile of the black female, whereas in Tanoux's we see that of the nude.



Fig. 4.4 Harem: After the Bath, c.1894 (color litho), Bouchard, Paul Louis (1853–1937)/Private Collection/Photo © Fototeca Gilardi/Bridgeman Images

Along the same lines, the sketch by the “well-known Victorian barrister and man of letters” Arthur Munby, in Fig. 4.6, illustrates contemporary assumptions about the differences between the English middle-class lady and the workingwoman. The lady on the left cuts an exquisite figure; her bell-shaped dress perched upon tiny feet and feathered hat give her an almost birdlike appearance. She seems delicate and flawless like, to use Munby’s own words, a woman made of “Dresden China.”²³ As in the

²³ McClintock, “Barrister and man of letters,” 76; “Dresden China woman,” 79; and Munby’s sketch, 105. McClintock has done extensive analysis on Munby’s sketches, photographs and diaries with regard to these issues.



Fig. 4.5 Adrien Tanoux, *Après le Bain*, 1912 © RMN-Grand Palais/Art Resource, NY

Orientalist paintings, the whiteness and elegant, leisurely life led by one female figure is made more obvious and pronounced by the blackness and work of another: opposite the Victorian lady stands the colliery woman whose labor in the mines has made her body massive and hulking, even masculine, by comparison and caused her skin to be darkened by coal dust. Also, in contrast to the lady's clean and fashionable skirts, the miner wears dirty clothes with men's trousers and heavy boots.



Fig. 4.6 Sketch by Arthur Munby, 1828–1910 (Poem Credit: Poem by Mohja Kahf. Reprinted with permission of the University Press of Florida)

The belief that work was so essentially incompatible with white womanhood that it not only produced gender ambiguity but signified racial alterity and inferiority served to reinforce global, imperial hierarchies while at the same time erasing and diminishing the value of female labor in England. The complex relationship between the politics surrounding the popular Victorian concept of the “angel in the house” and the active, productive and often multidimensional lives of women of all classes who lived during that time has been explored at length by recent generations of scholars.²⁴ It is now time to ask similar questions with regard to Orientalist images of the white harem slave.

After all, just as performing domestic chores did nothing to protect black female slaves from unwanted sexual advances from their masters or other family members, there is no reason to believe that imposing sexual expectations upon white ones freed them from all other types of responsi-

²⁴For example, *A Widening Sphere*, Martha Vicinus (ed.), Indiana UP, 1977, and Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes*, University of Chicago Press, 1987.

bility or work. Given that the Qur'an specifically forbids forcing slaves into prostitution and that once a slave bears the master's child she cannot be resold,²⁵ the amount of time that any one slave could spend engaged in sexual activity would necessarily have been limited, even in the case of an individual purchased as a concubine. Furthermore, domestic slavery could conceal a large range of productive tasks and skills,²⁶ and the idea that white slaves spent their days, indeed their entire lives, in a kind of perpetual idleness would seem to be as unrealistic as the Victorian belief that the lady's primary function in the household was ornamental. It is time for modern scholars to question not only the Orientalist conceit that with regard to female slaves, dark skin marked the domestic drudge while light-colored skin signified the sexual object, but to investigate the political purchase of this idea in the context of imperialism, and postcolonialism, in both the East and the West.²⁷

Regardless of skin color or area of origin, all harem slaves found themselves in circumstances where their bodies and labor legally belonged not to them but to their owners. The possibility that black and white female slaves may have created bonds, alliances and shared subcultures is worth exploring. For as Inès Dali has related in her recent chapter on the problem of the phenotype in the study of nineteenth-century Tunisian slavery, because religion and other social factors could play a more important role in determining the status and lifestyle of a slave than physical appearance, black and white slave girls from non-Muslim backgrounds were expected to perform the same types of household duties and could be seen working together.²⁸

The fact that in Muslim-dominated societies of North Africa and the Middle East white slaves had been, and during the nineteenth century, continued to be bought, sold and owned by nonwhite masters presented an implicit challenge to contemporary European imperialist ideas about the relationship between race and labor throughout the world, from the

²⁵ A.J. Arberry, *The Koran Interpreted*, NY, Simon & Schuster, 50, II. Robinson-Dunn, 12, 13, 26, 27.

²⁶ Clarence-Smith, 3. Here Clarence-Smith is referring to domestic slavery in Islam in general, throughout the world and through the centuries.

²⁷ After all Orientalist ideas about the corrupting influence of white slaves and concubines of previous eras can be found in modern writings intended for Arabic speaking and predominantly Muslim audiences as well as Western ones. For example, 'Abd al-Salam al-Tirmanini, *al-Riqq Madihu wa Hadiruhu* (Kuwait: al-Majlis al-Watani, 1979, 137–43.

²⁸ In *Couleurs*, 365.

Caribbean to the Far East.²⁹ In such a context, the harem of Orientalist fantasy, where white women resembled ladies of leisure who depended on the service of what would have been considered their inferior, nonwhite counterparts, the feminine subject is split through the ideology of race, thus simultaneously devaluing female labor while preserving the dominant contemporary European imperialist hierarchies. For the historian then, these images should be seen as cultural products and pieces of evidence from the past, the full meaning of which can be realized fully only in relation to other historical sources, such as the previously mentioned abolitionist materials, government correspondence and court records, that shed light on harem slavery and its demise during a time of increasing Western hegemony and expansion into this region of the world. The feminist and anti-feminist discourses employing the trope of the harem and those surrounding contemporary debates on “white slavery,” or prostitution in Europe, need to be consulted as well.

I do not deny the importance of Orientalist images with regard to the purely aesthetic experience, nor do I wish to dismiss the circumstances and intentions of their creators. My purpose, rather, is to encourage scholars, who are already in the process of subjecting historical documents to cultural analysis and examining cultural products such as literature and visual images as historical evidence, to incorporate Orientalist representations, and the accompanying gender-related questions, into their studies of slavery, abolition and imperialism in the Middle East and North Africa. The eventual support for the eradication of slavery; the widespread appreciation, reproduction and appropriation of Orientalist images of the harem; and the predominance of the ideal of the Western bourgeois home in these regions of the world all testify to the importance of pursuing this approach in order to shed light not only on European history but also on the larger shared culture of imperialism, which connected peoples of the East and West even as those very terms were defined through it.³⁰

Artists often depicted the harem as an elegant, feminine space, reflecting the contemporary Orientalist literature and cultural feminist discourse, which celebrated that institution as a manifestation of the private sphere in

²⁹ For example, after the abolition of slavery in the British and French colonies, sugar plantation owners in Trinidad and Guadeloupe continued to exploit nonwhite labor in the form of Indian and Asian indentured servants.

³⁰ Here Bhabha's concept of less than half times two to describe hybridity in the imperialist context is helpful, *Location of Culture*. Said's advances from *Orientalism* to *Culture and Imperialism* apply as well.

the most positive sense. In order to counter or overshadow these familiar ideas, English anti-slavery activists, as well as a number of liberal feminists, portrayed that institution as dark, sinister, oppressive and as contrary to freedom as the plantation slave's chains.³¹ The various and contradictory representations of the harem and slavery, however, need not be reconciled with one another nor connected by links of causation in order to shed light on the multidimensional global, imperial cultures in which they occurred and the equally complex historical actors who shaped and were, in turn, shaped by them.

By directing our attention to gender and Orientalism in the context of slavery and abolition in Muslim societies, modern scholars may feel as though they have placed themselves in the uncomfortable position of either drawing negative attention to Islam and thus contributing to the ongoing and very dangerous problem of Islamophobia in the West, or, alternatively, that they are acting as apologists for slavery and the oppression and objectification of females in the name of multiculturalism. In addition, representing Arabs as slave owners, even in the past, seems particularly problematic given that colonization, the effects of which are still felt today in Africa and the Middle East, can be considered a form of slavery, and that current Arab stereotypes in the West serve to divert sympathy from the Palestinians despite the fact that they continue to suffer from some of the very same abuses experienced by slaves in previous centuries such as the trauma of exile, loss of property and severe curtailment of personal freedom. I would like to suggest a possible alternative approach, one that examines the difficulties, constraints and obstacles presented by patriarchal beliefs and practices, both in the West as well as the East, from the European imperial nation-state to the Muslim courts, and the ways that the two have reinforced each other, while at the same time considering the creativity and agency of the women and girls who have in the past and continue in the present to live, work, operate within and at times even subvert them. For example, Mary Roberts has shown how powerful, intelligent and cultured Ottoman ladies of the nineteenth century challenged Western stereotypes by orchestrating portraits, which satirized European Orientalist representations of the harem.³² In our own time, we have seen a number of modern Shaharazads such as the

³¹ Robinson-Dunn, chapters 3 and 4.

³² Mary Roberts, *The Harem in Ottoman and Orientalist Art and Travel Literature*, Durham, Duke UP, 2007.

imaginative and resourceful women who shaped the harem girlhood of the Moroccan feminist scholar Fatima Mernissi and recreated the outside world denied to them by reenacting scenes from *1001 Nights*. Along the same lines, Nawar Al-Hassan Golley has helped to bring attention to the recent wave of Arab women writers, some of whom have a feminist message and have commented on men's femininity, and who hail not only from Syria, Lebanon and Egypt but also from Palestine and the Gulf states including Saudi Arabia and the Yemen.³³

By understanding the numerous and multilayered patriarchal structures, equally diverse efforts to assert the feminine, and the Orientalisms that could, and did, inform both, as products of the increasingly imbricated imperial and postcolonial world of the past three centuries, modern scholars can begin to reconstruct the various hegemonic gendered abolitionist ideologies of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and the cultures surrounding them, national and otherwise. For these systems of meaning informed identity and action not only in the areas I have studied, England and Egypt, but were created and recreated by historical actors and impacted upon the lives of millions of women and men, albeit in different ways, throughout Europe, the Middle East and Africa, particularly North Africa. Any sense of awkwardness that we might feel in exploring this topic should be regarded not as a reason to avoid or gloss over it, but rather as an indication that it must be confronted, analyzed and understood.

"Thawrah des Odalisques at the Matisse Retrospective"

Tawn min al-ayyam we just decided: Enough is enough
 A unique opportunity, the Retrospective brought us all together
 I looked across the gallery at Red Culottes and gave the signal
 She passed it on to Woman in Veil and we kicked
 through canvas
 Most of us have very good legs ---- lower body strength,
 you know
 The Persian Model needed help, but it wasn't her,
 it was the way she was drawn

Mais it wasn't just one day we up and decided, *CulottesGris*,
 I have to disagree. *Je voudrais dire*
c'etais les deux Mauresques muhadjabas

³³ Fatima Mernissi, *Dreams of Trespass*, Cambridge, MA, Perseus, 1994 and Nawar Golley, *Reading Arab Women's Autobiographies*, Austin, University of Texas Press, 2003.

Hey, we don't know they were Moroccan, With Magnolias

Oui, mais it was like seeing *nous-mêmes*,
Mauresque comme moi, models of ourselves, walk by in veils
 then walk coolly out of the museum

"She must be so uncomfortable in that position"
 these two museumgoers murmured in front of Two Odalisques
 Suddenly I felt my back aching
 A seventy-five year kind of ache
 I scattered the chessboard I had been painted with

We woke up Harmony in Yellow
 (all she'd eaten in years was lemons)
 Asia and Zulma, older, led the procession
 "Everyone whose arms are numb from sleeping on them,
 raise your hands"
 Blue Nude decided she was with us
 because of her eyes and her posture
 Pink Nude wanted in though she wasn't an odalisque
 because "that bastard, my ass is cold from these blue tiles
 and I can't love a man who made my head smaller than my tits,
 almost an afterthought"
 Being very Modern she knew all
 the dirty words in several languages
 and was great fun to have along
 Woman with Goldfish came
 She had a migraine, *miskini*, from all those years
 sitting and staring at her goldfish swim in circles
 around, around, around, around
 till fish was woman and woman fish
 She brought the goldfish, bowl and all, under her arm
 We shook the others by the ostrich feather hats,
 knocked on the Renoirs next door
 to see if they wanted to come
 but they still believed the hype, were getting lots of praise
 as the Impressionists' girls, people came from miles around,
 that type of thing
 We didn't judge them, what woman doesn't like attention?

Amwal shee we all wanted to pee
 Then Hindu Pose and With Tambourine
 led us in some stretches

I helped With Turkish Chair rebraid her hair
 Most of the Culottes and With Magnolias wanted clothes
 Their nipples were icy and they were coughing,
 The draft in the gallery had gone straight to their chests
 The next thing everybody wanted to do was leave
 The guards were understandably upset but we noticed
 many of us were larger than life

tara nabna akbar minhum
'w akbar min abuhum!

Zulma reached up for us being tallest
 and tore down museum banners
 for the ones who wanted clothes
 Somebody must have called the Board Members,
 because outside
 men with distinguished looks and women with perfect makeup
 and large expensive brooches tried to reason with us
 Somehow the news leaked quickly to the press

Pink Nude got the most movie offers
Playboy tried to talk the pants off the Culottes
Vantage offered a lucrative advance to With Magnolias
 for a book deal
 with promos on *Good Morning America*,
 and Geraldo wanted to know
 did Matisse ever masturbate with us.

Matisse this, Matisse that ---
 No one wanted to know about us

Statements were issued on our behalf
 by Arab nationalists, Iranian dissidents, Western feminists
 The National Organization of Women got annoyed
 after some of us put on *hijab*,
 and wouldn't let us speak at their rally,
 but wanted us up on their dais as tokens of diversity
 Then someone spread conspiracy rumors about us
 among the Arabs

Like, why had we hung around so long? In the capitals
 of the Western world so long? With our legs so open?
 You can see the *les implications dangereuses*
 It did no good to tell them we didn't choose the poses
 we were painted in. Or that anyway, our sexuality,

when we choose to put it into play,
 is our business. Narrow-minded bastards,
 I'll say it even though they are my Arab brothers,
 a hundred years since we entered those paintings
 and they're still stuck in a Neanderthal cave
 on that whole man-woman thing

The world we woke to is full of countries
 most of us have never heard of before:
 The Ottomans had fallen in 1924. Twenty-two
 Arab states and Israel
 in the middle like a stiletto.

The Lamé Robe immediately got involved
 In the Algerian civil war. She had family
 alive, on different sides.

The Persian Model went on Hajj, got arrested
 In an anti-Saudi demonstration (oh those Iranians)
 Red Culottes, it turned out, had cancer
 Exposure of the breasts to Paris and New York air
Zulm wallah, so that was when
 I, Small Odalisque in a Purple Robe,
 decided to study law, all of it:
 English Common, Napoleonic Code,
 German, Russian, Turkish, Egyptian civil,
 Islamic shariah, American constitutional, one by one
 We sued the pants off the Matisse estate and the museums:
 Cruel and unusual contortions, unhealthy and unfair
 working conditions at nonexistent wages,
 in many cases with only lemons and oranges to eat,
 causing citric overdosage and extreme
 puckering,

all to indulge somebody's sense of color. Pink Nude
 was there to say, fuck your sense of color
 in the twenty-seven European languages
 she'd overheard from sixty years of patrons,
 which the jury was instructed to disregard

I in my Purple Robe gave the closing argument
 "We're not anti-art, we love the Expressionists.
 And the Impressionists, and Cubists even. Why,
 just last week, I bought a Klimt.

Even Matisse, we love his cutouts,
 pure color, pure shape set free in modern space.
 We just don't want to be made something we're not
 It's a lie. The paintings lie about us. We were made to live a lie."
 The post-Cold War jury was sympathetic
 We were starting to make headway and it felt good

Suddenly Asia got a call
 from Bayadère Culottes wanting to end it,
 sobbing, "we don't fit in anywhere anymore it's too late too late,
 with Matisse we are nothing, without Matisse nothing.
 You can take the odalisque out of the oda, but can you ever
 take the oda out of the odalisque, can you can you?"
 Harmony in Yellow said we had to get back together

Anwal b'awwal

Maybe form a support group, as in
 "Hi I'm Odalisque with Big Breasts.
 I was painted by Matisse,
 but I'm in control now."

That's when we found out With Magnolias
 had been painted pregnant
 so we all got together for her delivery
 She sat in an Ottoman-era birthing chair
 we took out of a photograph
 (I got to marveling at that—
 how many things can we pull from history and reuse?)

We held her hands, Bayadère wiped her brow
 We were all wondering *ya allah, ya fattah* but afraid
 Would the baby be smothered by the same aesthetic forms,
 would it be killed by paint fumes from another era
 before it had a chance to breathe its options?
 She screamed She pushed She crowned She gushed And then!

It was like nothing any of us had ever seen. Pure life,
 pure energy.
 It was a girl! She waved her fists. She let go
 With a high-pitched protest to the world.
 Only a smudge
 Only a tiny smudge, lime-green, on her left temple,
 I, Small Odalisque, drew up my purple robe and ululated

and we all ululated
in post-odalisquesque
jube-jube-jube-jube-jubilation

1994

Written by Mohja Kahf, a Syrian-born, Arab-American poet, and published in her collection *E-mails from Scheherazad* (Reprinted with the permission of University Press Florida, 2003).



The Figure of the Eunuch in the *Lettres persanes*: Re-evaluation and Resistance

Sarga Moussa

Translated by Helen Harrison

Eunuchs are frequently associated with the “mutes of the seraglio,” deaf-mute servants who were introduced into the court of the Ottoman sultans and who could appear, cord in hand, before anyone marked for execution—a younger brother complicating the crown prince’s accession to the throne, a jealous concubine, a minister accused of treachery. The eunuch himself is, though in another fashion, a “mute of the seraglio.” He is charged not with executing base deeds, but primarily with guarding the women’s quarters. If he is not physiologically deprived of a voice, one can say nonetheless that he lives in a situation of alienation, since he is totally subjected to the word of the master. In this sense, he constitutes a remarkable example of *subalternity*.¹

¹ See Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” (1988), text translated by Jérôme Vidal under the title *Les Subalternes peuvent-elles parler?* Paris, Éditions Amsterdam/Multitude, 2009.

S. Moussa (✉)

CNRS, UMR THALIM (CNRS-Université Paris 3), Paris, France

But what is a eunuch? He is first of all, in the most current sense of the term, a “castrated man who guards the women in oriental harems.”² The word harks back, etymologically, to the ancient Greek *eunouchès*, “he who guards the couch.” Physiologically, eunuchs have undergone the removal of the testicles, sometimes of the penis as well.³ An extremely traumatizing operation, performed in general on young children, many of whom died of it. Those who survived saw their morphology modified, as shown most notably by the absence of facial or pubic hair and by a higher voice.⁴ Contrary to what one might think, castration is a universal phenomenon. There are examples in Africa as well as in Asia, and even in Europe, for instance the castrati of Italian opera.⁵ But the castration that interests us was practiced on slaves in Persia and the Ottoman empire, whether those slaves were Black (as were the majority) or White. The former were assigned to the interior of harems, the latter to the exterior guard of that sacred place—the harem is a “forbidden” space (that is the etymology of the word⁶), forbidden to any person of the masculine sex other than its owner or young boys.

² Definition given by the dictionary *Robert historique de la langue française*, accessible on line. On the different functions of eunuchs in the Ottoman empire, see Ehud Toledano, *Slavery and the Abolition in the Ottoman Middle East*, Seattle and London, University of Washington Press, 1998, p. 20 and following. In *As if Silent and Absent*, E. Toledano reminds us, furthermore, that eunuchs were “the mediators between the women of elite harems and the male world” (New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 2007, p. 13).

³ According to the traveler Jean-Baptiste Tavernier (whom Montesquieu had read before writing the *Lettres persanes*), the removal of the testicles concerned White eunuchs (those who stayed outside the harem), while Black eunuchs also underwent the removal of the penis (*Nouvelle Relation de l'intérieur du serral du Grand Seigneur...*, Paris, Varennes, 1675, p. 17, quoted by Catherine Volpillac-Augier and Philip Stewart in Montesquieu, *Œuvres complètes*, under the direction of Jean Ehrard and C. Vopilhac-Augier, vol. 1, *Lettres persanes*, Oxford, Voltaire Foundation, 2004, Introduction, p. 55).

⁴ Buffon, in *De l'homme* (1749), already wonders about “this correspondence between the voice and the generative parts” (*Œuvres complètes*, vol. VIII, Paris, Pourret, 1835, p. 398). See the new edition of this text by Michèle Duchet, afterword by Claude Blanckaert, Paris, L'Harmattan, 2006.

⁵ See Olivier Marliave, *Le Monde des eunuques*, Paris, Imago, 2011, p. 8.

⁶ See the entry *harim* in the *Encyclopédie de l'islam*, online edition in English. For a critique of the masculine view of the harem, see Billie Melman, *Women's Orients. English Women and the Middle East, 1718–1918*, Ann Arbor, The University of Michigan Press, 1992; and, more recently, Reina Lewis, *Rethinking Orientalism: Women, Travel and Ottoman Harem*, London, Tauris, 2004.

In other words, the eunuch is not really considered a man: deliberately de-virilized, thus deprived of the possibility of reaching physical climax (which does not mean that all desire or all will to phallic power has been extinguished in him⁷), he constitutes an ambiguous being, unclassifiable in terms of gender.⁸ He disturbs or he fascinates, as is shown by the way travelers speak of him.

THREE TRAVELERS

We know that the author of *L'Esprit des lois* was greatly inspired by travelers to the East.⁹ This is already the case for the Montesquieu of the *Lettres persanes* (1721). While perusing the writings of three travelers of the second half of the seventeenth century, one makes an initial observation: though one cannot speak of an obsessive presence, eunuchs are well represented in this corpus. Be it in the *Voyages* of Bernier (1670–1671), of Tavernier (1676–1679) or of Chardin (1686), the term “eunuch” occurs dozens of times and, moreover, in different contexts: in India, in the Ottoman empire or in Persia. If eunuchs are always linked to the “seraglio,” as one said at the time, confusing the palace with its harem, they cannot, presumably, be a direct object of study for the travelers. On the other hand, the travelers willingly report the stories they have heard about eunuchs. Thus, the young doctor François Bernier recounts “a very deadly accident which made a lot of noise in Delhi, and above all in the seraglio, and which disabused many people who, like myself, had a hard time believing that eunuchs, though cut clean, could fall in love like other men.”¹⁰ What follows is the recital of the “little love affairs” between Didar Khan, one of the chief eunuchs of the seraglio of the Mogol emperor Aurengzeb, and a woman lodging near him. The two lovers are discovered by the husband, who kills them. But the husband, Bernier believes, must henceforth fear the vengeance of the eunuchs:

⁷ Lisa Lowe reminds us of the link that unites Usbek (always absent from his harem) and his eunuchs who have stayed in Persia. Both incarnate a phallic desire that is eternally unsatisfied: “In the harem world described in the *Lettres [persanes]*, castration coexists always with an idealized memory of possession and power: it is the mark of a state of lack which is characterized by desire that can never be fulfilled” (*Critical Terrains. French and British Orientalisms*, Ithaca and London, Cornell University Press, 1991, p. 63).

⁸ All citations translated by Helen Harrison.

⁹ Muriel Dodds, *Les Récits de voyage, sources de l'“Esprit des lois” de Montesquieu* (1929), Slatkine reprint, Genève, 1980.

¹⁰ “Les *Voyages* de François Bernier,” in Frédéric Tinguely (dir.), *Un libertin dans l'Inde moghole*, Paris, Chandeigne, 2008, p. 143.

One does not believe, however, that he will long be able to avoid the power and the malice of the eunuchs, for it is not the same, as one commonly says here, for men as for animals: the latter become gentler and more tractable when they are cut, and men become more vicious and malicious. They are generally arrogant and unbearable, except when these vices, as sometimes happens, change, I don't know how, into fidelity, bravery and a marvelous generosity.¹¹

The portrait is meant to be balanced: eunuchs are supposedly made malicious because of the operation they have undergone, and on the other hand, counter-examples exist, which testify to an axiological reversal. But in reality, one already sees here the appearance of a basic characteristic of the figure of the eunuch, as it most often appears in French literature of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries: this is not only a degraded and immoral being, but also an inexplicable one, escaping Occidental Reason.

Tavernier is no doubt the most famous traveler of his time, the precious stones that he brought back from the Orient having contributed not a little to his reputation—Boileau even devoted some verses to him in the form of an eulogy.¹² References to eunuchs are relatively numerous in the six volumes on his travels in Turkey and Persia. They appear there both as the guardians of harems and as characters who can play an unofficial political role, in so far as they are close to power. But eunuchs are also, as they are in the *Lettres persanes*, servants who watch over women, whether the women are in their own apartments or whether they go out on an excursion, something which does occasionally happen and which then necessitates a heightened vigilance. If Black eunuchs, in Tavernier, become objects of a truly negrophobic portrait,¹³ White eunuchs appear, for their part, as creatures capable of the worst cruelties:

While Cha-Abbas II was in the country with his wives, one of his valets who had helped set up the pavilions was tired from travel and by ill fortune fell asleep under one of those tents. When the King's wives arrived and found this man asleep and threw up a great cry at the sight, the Eunuchs took him without waking him up, folded him up in the rugs on which he was lying, and buried him alive.¹⁴

¹¹ Ibid., p. 144.

¹² See Nicolas Boileau, *Œuvres complètes*, Paris, Garnier-Flammarion, 1969, p. 146.

¹³ In his *Nouvelle Relation...*, Tavernier gives a particularly repulsive portrait of Black eunuchs: "A flat nose, a terrible gaze, and a big mouth, fat lips, black teeth spaced far apart from each other [...] are advantages for the merchants who sell them" (quoted by C. Volpilhac-Augier and Ph. Stewart in their editions of *Lettres persanes*, Montesquieu, *Œuvres complètes*, op. cit., t. I, p. 55).

¹⁴ *Les six voyages de Monsieur Jean-Baptiste Tavernier*, Paris, Clouzier, 1679, t V, p. 706.

White or Black, eunuchs have suffered castration. It is exactly as if they were reproducing the traumatic violence they have been victims of, but by projecting it on other people. And in fact, they belong to the *system* that Montesquieu denounces,¹⁵ a system of the arbitrary, a system of tyranny exercised by a power whose supposed despotism manifests itself on a political as well as a domestic level.

Finally, in the writings of Jean Chardin, a scholar and merchant whose *Voyages en Perse* constitute a particularly important source for the *Lettres persanes*, the word “eunuch” also appears rather frequently. The word is, for example, associated with women, when it is a question of determining who really governs at a time when the sultan Mehemet IV (1648–1687) is still very young.¹⁶ Going beyond this particular case, Chardin looks at eunuchs in a way that is already “sociological,” as he makes distinctions about their functions and their skin color (only the king may possess White eunuchs, a sign of distinction, as are White slaves).¹⁷

There are two kinds of eunuchs, White and Black. The White ones never go among the women, or at least very rarely do so, whereas the Black hardly leave the palace. The White ones accompany the king, when he goes out, and the chamberlain is always an old White eunuch. He is not free to enter the rooms of the seraglio, I mean the private apartments of the women, without having been called there or taken there by the king; but except for that, his authority is great, for he is established above all the eunuchs in the palace. He almost never leaves the king, and is always the closest to the king's person, whether in assemblies or anywhere else.¹⁸

Despite his concern for realism, it is the manifestation of power that fascinates Chardin. About Black eunuchs, associated with harems, one learns almost nothing. On the contrary, the chief of the White eunuchs,

¹⁵ See Alain Grosrichard, *Structure du sérail*, Paris, Le Seuil, 1979, in particular p. 183 and following: the author proposes a lacanian reading while showing the link that unites eunuchs to the sultan, an all-powerful figure who paradoxically incarnates an *empty* centrality. Furthermore, “oriental despotism” was for a long time the object of a largely fantasmic representation in the Occident, a representation that inscribes itself in a *discourse* whose ideological mechanisms Edward Said has taken apart (*Orientalism*, 1978; French translation by Catherine Malamoud, Paris, Le Seuil, 1980, reissued 2005).

¹⁶ *Voyages du Chevalier Chardin*, ed. Louis Langlois, Paris, Le Normant, 1811, vol. I, pp. 28, 97, 103.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, vol. VI, p. 45.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, vol. V., pp. 378–379.

who serves as a conduit of royal authority, is described at length in terms of all his functions, but also in terms of all his attributes, which convey a certain splendor ("he carries, attached to his belt, a golden casket, decorated with precious stones..."¹⁹).

This is not the perspective adopted by Montesquieu when he makes eunuchs speak, as we will see. But that does not keep him from drawing this or that piece of information from Chardin, who shows a certain empathy toward eunuchs, especially in book VI of the *Voyages*, where an entire chapter is devoted to them:

It is the jealousy that men have about women, in the Orient, that has produced this cruel and unnatural invention of making eunuchs: but although they were first only destined to guard women, eunuchs have been found suitable for the greatest affairs (vol. VI, p. 43). Eunuchs, in great houses, are also the tutors and governors of children[...]. I have seen very learned eunuchs.²⁰

No disdain from the pen of this traveler, but instead a look, both admiring and compassionate, at the way in which eunuch become attached to their master, to the women of the harem, to the children of those women. This re-evaluation of a normally disparaged figure foreshadows the ethical point of view that Montesquieu will introduce in his *Lettres persanes*.

THE REPRESENTATION OF EUNUCHS IN THE *LETTRES PERSANES*

If eunuchs are both the authors and the addressees of a certain number of missives in the *Lettres persanes*, they are also objects of discourse, in so far as they appear both in the letters written by the Persian travelers and in those by the women left behind in Ispahan. Moreover, the portrayal of eunuchs, in this polyphonic novel, is not univocal and cannot be reduced to a stereotypical image, such as that still found in the *Traité des eunuques*, published in 1707 by the historian Charles Ancillon, who depicts eunuchs as effeminate creatures, both lascivious and timid, in contrast to the moral values traditionally associated with virility.²¹

¹⁹ Ibid., vol. V, pp. 379.

²⁰ Ibid., vol. VI, pp. 40–41.

²¹ Thus, for Ancillon, eunuchs are persons "who have a shrill and languid voice, a woman's complexion, and who only have a little fuzz for a beard; in whom courage and boldness give

Let us see how women, in the *Lettres persanes*, express themselves on the topic of eunuchs. Zéphis, one of Usbek's wives, speaks to him about the First eunuch in these terms:

Finally, this Black monster has decided to drive me to despair. He wants to take my slave Zélide from me by any means possible: Zélide who serves me with such affection, and whose skillful hands bring ornaments and grace everywhere [...] I am so unhappy! Neither my seclusion nor my virtue can protect me from extravagant suspicions: a vile slave comes and attacks me even in your heart, and I must defend myself there!²²

We learn at the end of the novel that the women of the seraglio are not as innocent as Zélide claims (thus, the “skillful hands” are surely used for something other than just carrying tea and sorbet), but she does also show that it cannot be otherwise in the system of polygamy, at least not in the system of polygamy that Montesquieu and his contemporaries imagine—an “institution” that permanently implies the neglect of one woman for the benefit of another. A world of lies and suspicion exacerbated by the departure of the master, the seraglio appears as the antithesis of the ideal society of the Troglodytes (letters X to XIV), who live virtuously according to the laws of nature, with a transparency of heart that is already Rousseauiste. The eunuch, who is the eye of the absent master, is permanently placed in the position of the inquisitor. Rejected from the bed-chamber by the women of the harem, he invents offenses or surprises real ones, without hesitating to look through the keyhole. Whether he is a slanderer or an informer, the eunuch, from whom one has removed organs of pleasure and generation, must in turn prevent any form of *jouissance*²³ or reproduction other than that chosen by Usbek.

way to fear and timidity; in a word, whose customs and manners are completely effeminate. If the Eunuch is such a vile and miserable subject in respect to his body, he is worth even less in regards to his mind and heart” (*Traité des eunuques*, Paris, 1707, pp. 6–7; text re-edited in 2007 in a L’Harmattan edition by Michela Gardini, who shows very well, in her introduction, the particular status of the *Lettres persanes*, which “offer incontestably the richest repertory of oriental eunuchs, neither men nor women, at once slaves and despots” p. 12).

²² Montesquieu, *Lettres persanes*, ed. Jacques Roger, Paris, GF, 1964, p. 28.

²³ Translator’s note: In this passage, I have translated “jouir physiquement” as “reaching physical climax,” but the word “jouir” has much more polyvalence than any English equivalent. “Jouir” is “to enjoy,” but it is also “to have an orgasm.” Similarly, the noun form, “jouissance” means “pleasure,” “ecstasy,” and in certain contexts, “orgasm.” Henceforth, I leave these words untranslated in the text.

One may observe that the eunuch Zéphis speaks of has no name, only the title “Black monster.” This is highly significant, since this title refers at once to the physiological “monstrosity” of the castrated male and to a creature whose skin color is understood to translate moral “blackness.” A degraded *Ersatz* for the master, the eunuch is the master’s dark side, who symbolizes for the women of the harem both the absence and the banning of *jouissance*. Hence, the violence of their discourse about him, a violence that one finds again in one of the last letters from the pen of Zélis as she denounces the “tyranny” that Usbek wields through a “barbarous eunuch.”²⁴

To the cruelty of the eunuch, linked to his assigned role, is added, still from the point of view of the women he is supposed to guard, his hypocrisy, since in truth and despite his castration, he is by no means deprived of desire: “Never has a passion been stronger and more vital than that of Cosrou, a White eunuch, for my slave Zélide: he has been asking for her in marriage with so much furor that I cannot refuse to give her to him,” Zélis confides to Usbek.²⁵ Even while denouncing a “false marriage,”²⁶ an expression that may refer to the *Traité des eunuques* by Ancillon, who was seeking to warn women precisely against any union that would not have reproduction as its ultimate goal, Zélis reveals one of the great truths that the *Lettres persanes* transmits to us in a way that is very modern (but close to Diderot). One cannot kill pleasure, and the eunuch himself remains susceptible to amorous passion. He is a man, which is also to say (and this weakness is the very proof of his humanity) a creature capable of *falling* in love, even if this would be as a victim of the vengeful plan, which Roxane, humiliated and desperate, reveals to Usbek in her last letter: “Yes, I deceived you: I seduced your eunuchs, I got the best of your jealousy...”²⁷ Theoretically subject to the law of the master, the women of the seraglio come little by little to contest this hierarchy.²⁸

But let us see how eunuchs appear in the letters written by men. The slave Pharan complains to Usbek of the First Black Eunuch, “the most evil

²⁴ Ibid., p. 250 (letter 148).

²⁵ Ibid., p. 95 (letter 53).

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 252 (letter 161).

²⁸ On the subversive nature of Roxane’s suicide, see Jean-Starobinski, *Montesquieu par lui-même*, Paris, Le Seuil, 1953, p. 68–69. For a re-examination of this question, see my article “La chaîne de l’esclavage dans les *Lettres persanes*”, in *Littérature et esclavage*, Sarga Moussa (ed.), Paris, Desjonquères, 2010, in particular pp. 56–58.

of all men,”²⁹ he says, for this eunuch plans to confide to Pharan the keeping of the women, which would entail castrating him. The viewpoint of the absent master is obviously completely different, since, for him, the preservation of his harem rests precisely on the system of eunuchism. From the beginning of the *Lettres persanes*, eunuchs are indeed at the heart of a plan of surveillance whose smooth functioning the master must always ensure. Even before addressing his wives (he does that for the first time in letter 20, destined for Zachi), Usbek writes to his friends, and to the First Black Eunuch, to whom he addresses his second letter, and whom he reminds of his position in the hierarchy: a slave in the service of his master, he is “by a reversion of power”³⁰ the master of the women of the harem. Oscillating between the disquiet that gnaws at him and the threats he wields from afar, Usbek expresses from the outset the despotic Law, in letter 21, which he addresses to the First White Eunuch:

I swear by all the prophets of Heaven, and by Hali, the greatest of all, that if you stray from your duty, I will look at your life in same way I look at that of the insects that I find beneath my feet.³¹

Finally, in the first letter he addresses to Roxane, he claims to envy her situation, thus trying to reassure himself—here again, the guardians of the harem become the substitutes for the authority of the absent master of the Ispahan seraglio: “Happy Roxane: When you have been in the country, you have always had eunuchs to walk in front of you in order to kill any bold men who haven’t fled your sight.”³² But in reality, Usbek himself reveals rather rapidly the weak points of his own system. As early as Letter 27, which he addresses to his friend Nessir, he envisages a hypothetical relaxation of harem discipline, a consequence of his own absence: “If my eunuchs thought me in danger, if they could hope that a cowardly complacency would go unpunished, they would soon cease to be deaf to the flattering voice of that sex which can make rocks listen and stir inanimate things.”³³

Usbek thus foresees a well-known method: *surveillance and punishment*. But as there are already, if one may say so, the seeds of Foucault in Montesquieu, the main hero of the *Lettres persanes* will rapidly understand

²⁹ Montesquieu, *Lettres persanes*, J. Roger (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 78 (letter 42).

³⁰ Ibid., p. 26.

³¹ Ibid., p. 58.

³² Ibid., p. 58 (letter 26).

³³ Ibid., p. 61.

that this discourse, as constraining as it may be, is totally impracticable. He first realizes this, thanks to a meeting with a Frenchman, of whom one can say without too much risk of error that he incarnates a point of view close to that of the author. Usbek writes his friend Ibben on the topic of the system of polygamy and of the harem:

One day when I was discussing this with a man of this country [France], he said to me: "What shocks me the most about your customs is that you are obliged to live with slaves whose hearts and minds always show the baseness of their condition [...] What can one expect of the education one receives from a miserable creature whose honor consists in guarding the wives of another man and who takes pride in the vilest work that there is among humans [...]"³⁴

One clearly sees, with this example, that if the Persians' observation of France is an indirect means of engaging in a critique of that country,³⁵ by a reverse symmetry, Usbek's confrontation with the French Enlightenment leads him to question his own cultural presuppositions. When he writes to Réhdi, Usbek will have totally interiorized this *enlightened* view of eunuchs: "But what a loss for society is this great number of men dead from birth! What depopulation must follow from this!"³⁶ Even if one leaves aside the cruel and unjust nature of castration, the simple consideration of *public interest* should argue, according to the philosophical perspective that is Montesquieu's own, for renouncing eunuchs. They are symptoms of decreasing demographics, and thus, it is judged, of a weakened social body.

THE EUNUCHS SPEAK OUT

Jean Ehrard has observed, as have Philip Stewart and Catherine Volpilhac-Augier before him, that with Letter 9 of the *Lettres persanes*, written by the First Eunuch to Ibbi, "this is no doubt the first time in our literature that a Black speaks on his own behalf, or—more exactly—the first time that

³⁴Ibid., pp. 69–70 (letter 34).

³⁵On this point, see Céline Spector, *Montesquieu et les "Lettres persanes"*. Paris, PUF, 1997, p. 77 (parallel between Versailles and the seraglio) and Allan Singerman, "Réflexion sur une métaphore: le sérail des *Lettres persanes*", *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century*, n. 185, 1980, p. 184 and following (the eunuch as a metaphor for the courtier).

³⁶Montesquieu, *Lettres persanes*, J. Roger (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 183 (Letter 114).

one speaks out.”³⁷ A Black, indeed, but also, and what is even more unique, a eunuch: a doubly strong *coup* on the part of Montesquieu, and one that makes us reconsider the expression “mutes of the seraglio,” an expression often associated with eunuchs, even if, in fact, it refers to the function of the executioner. Eunuchs indeed have a *voice*, at least in Montesquieu. If they say that they want to remain faithful to their master, they protest, at the same time, against the fate that has been dealt to them.

One proof of this is Letter 9, where the First Black Eunuch complains from the outset of being “enclosed in a terrible prison,”³⁸ while his addressee, in contrast, is lucky enough to escape by accompanying his “former master on his travels.”³⁹ This eloquent eunuch describes in detail the way in which the women of the harem torment him night and day and do not hesitate to place him in the paradoxical position of a person who finds himself *closed in and on the outside* (“they station me behind their door and chain me there night and day”⁴⁰). A position which is in fact untenable, since it is the one that the eunuch is supposed to occupy voluntarily, while in reality he left it long ago, seduced by these women who are themselves waiting for pleasure. All of a sudden, the eunuch loses all authority over them, and the seraglio, which should be like a well-regulated “little empire,”⁴¹ instead resembles a society whose anarchical movements are incomprehensible, as the slaves are enticed or rejected in a random manner, at the mercy of feminine “whims”: “They have their fifteen-minute spells when I am not listened to, their fifteen-minute spells when nothing is refused, their fifteen-minute spells when I am always wrong.”⁴² Far from being a place of pleasure, the harem is transformed into a space of perversion, of suffering, of shared violence. If the eunuchs torture the women they are supposed to guard, the women pay them back: the “seraglio” is a thus a vast prison, where frustration, fear and, in the end, death reign. On this point, men and women agree as they turn a totally demystifying insid-

³⁷ Jean Ehrard (*Lumières et esclavage*, Bruxelles, éditions André Versaille, 2008, p. 82) refers to the edition of the *Lettres persanes* produced by Philip Stewart and Catherine Vopilhac-Auger in the framework of the *Oeuvres complètes* of Montesquieu, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 56.

³⁸ Montesquieu, *Lettres persanes*, J. Roger (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 33.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 35.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 34.

⁴² Ibid., pp. 35–36.

er's gaze on that same harem that travelers and painters are generally tempted to make an object of fantasy, a place of multiplied sexuality.⁴³

But the eunuch, upon whom the fragile equilibrium of the harem completely depends (one sees it clearly, *a contrario*, with Letter 149 announcing the death of the Great Eunuch) is not satisfied with unmasking the hypocrisy of the master's discourse on the supposed happiness of his wives, whose reclusion allegedly guarantees their virtue. In this same Letter 9, the First Eunuch also denounces the injustice of which he has been a victim, an injustice that has reached him in his very body, and that has the consequence, as he puts it in a superb formula, of "separating [him] from [him] self."⁴⁴ The act of castration, which is introduced here in language that is both "gauzy" and transparent, will be diffused (as one might say of a pain) throughout the entirety of the novel. One will find this theme again in Letter 64, written by the chief of the Black eunuchs, in a short autobiographical narrative, which modestly evokes the two traumatizing events he experience as an adolescent, first his capture at age 15 in Africa ("my fatherland," as he specifies) and then the "painful operation," which followed when his master judged him suitable for keeping the women of the harem.⁴⁵

All of that is recounted in an elliptical and euphemistic way, but these things are said. They are said in a way that is much rawer in Letter 41, where the First Black Eunuch addresses himself to Usbek in order to explain the resistance he is encountering on the part of the slave Pharan, destined to replace a Black eunuch who has just died: "he began to cry out as if we were trying to skin him alive, and he managed to escape from our hands and the fatal knife."⁴⁶

As for Pharan, he himself writes to Usbek, "his sovereign lord," to beg him to spare him "this barbarism," which would make him "step down from humanity."⁴⁷ Castration is thus not only an act of "devirilization," it is an act of *inhumanity*. That is why, if the eunuch is no longer completely a man, he who orders castration is truly a *barbarian*, the antithesis of the idea of *civilization* that runs through the Enlightenment. What the slave Pharan says here is something quite different from an expression of personal fear: in his pleading with Usbek, he clearly marks a limit, a limit past

⁴³ See Carla Coco, *Harem. L'Orient amoureux*, French translation by Retho Morgenthaler, Paris, Mengès, 1997.

⁴⁴ Montesquieu, *Lettres persanes*, J. Roger (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 33.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 111.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 42 (letter 79).

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

which humanity changes to its opposite as a result of the trauma of castration, which aims to deprive man both of the ability to *jouir* and the ability to reproduce. By denouncing the fate dealt to him, the eunuch pleads more generally (and thus, more *universally*), for the integrity of the human body: his speech is itself a form of resistance where one can hear a very modern critique of any form of torture.

To come back to the First Black Eunuch, one can briefly quote Letter 15, less often commented on and much shorter than the ninth, but every bit as moving and interesting. It has the peculiarity of being addressed to Jaron, another Black eunuch. Speech here belongs entirely here to the “subalterns,” addressor and addressee. Here is what the first says to the second, while recounting something that sounds like a story of adoption:

The time came when my master turned his eyes on you. Long before nature had spoken in you, the iron blade separated you from nature. I won't tell you if I pitied you or if I felt pleasure in seeing you raised to my station. I quieted your tears and your cries. I believed I was seeing you be born a second time and leave the servitude where you would always have to obey in order to enter a servitude where you were supposed to command. I took care of your education. Severity, always inseparable from instruction, long kept you from knowing that you were dear to me. You were, however, and I would tell you that I loved you as a father loves a son, if these names of father and son could be appropriate to our destiny.⁴⁸

Can one show oneself more *human* than this “father” who does not dare call himself a father? But also, how can one be more lucid than the First Black Eunuch, who understands after the fact (“I *believed* I was seeing you...”) that castration is a double form of slavery?

Let us finally note that the First Black Eunuch, the most eloquent eunuch of the *Lettres persanes*, is, very symbolically, deprived of a name. A prisoner of his function, he finds in speech a kind of liberty that transcends the “mutism” of subalterns. His very anonymity thus makes his discourse potentially generalizable. The death of this eunuch, who is, by the way, immediately replaced with another (who has a name: Narsit), becomes significant in light of a History at once tragic and unfinished: what will come about after the anarchy that reigns in the seraglio at the end of the *Lettres persanes*? No one knows. But the characters created by the letter writer are henceforth *conscious* of themselves, of the injustice they suffer

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 45.

and perhaps of the possibility of acting on their own destiny. There is no doubt, in any case, that the death of the First Black Eunuch is far from a simple novelistic peripeteia in Montesquieu's eyes. Instead, this death is meant to transform itself into an accusing sacrifice, into a legitimizing force in the ideological combat to come. Like the narrative of Roxane's suicide, the tale of the First Black Eunuch's disappearance is not the sign of a return to silence, but, on the contrary, it is the sign of a protestation, of a resistance to the despotic and deadly system of the seraglio.

* * *

One knows the quip Valéry uttered, in 1926, at the end of his "Préface aux *Lettres persanes*": "But who will explain all these eunuchs to me?"⁴⁹ One wonders, at first, if this is a bit of humor or a real question. But what follows the sentence gives the beginning of an answer: "I don't doubt that there is a secret and profound reason for the almost obligatory presence of these characters who have been so cruelly separated from so many things, and in a sense from themselves." In giving such a clear echo of the narrative of the First Black Eunuch in Letter 9 ("When my first master formed the cruel plan [...] of separating me forever from myself..."), Valéry shows that he has certainly understood the revolt that Montesquieu expresses by giving voice to the First Eunuch, who figures probably as the person suffering the greatest injustice in the *Lettres persanes*.

Indeed, he seems to accumulate all the "defects": he is a slave, he is Black and his total castration brings him close to the feminine sex, which is associated, moreover, with a whole series of negative values. It suffices, to convince oneself of this, to recall the jokes that eunuchs have been subject to since Antiquity, whether in the epigrams of Martial⁵⁰ or in the satires of Juvenal.⁵¹ The eunuch is not only a man who resembles, by certain physiological characteristics, a woman (a creature "deprived" of masculine sex organs and whose voice has become more shrill), he is also a person

⁴⁹Text cited in *Variétés II* (1930). See Paul Valéry, *Variétés I et II*, Paris, Gallimard, "Idées", 1978, p. 186.

⁵⁰ "Numa one day saw the Eunuch Thelis who had on a skirt, he said that was a woman of evil living condemned to appear that way" ("D'un Eunuque", Épigramme LII, in *Toutes les épigrammes de Martial en latin et en français*, 2nd part, Paris, G. de Luyne, 1655, p. 225).

⁵¹ "Other women love the eunuch and his feeble delights, / His feminine kisses, without beard and always smooth, / Which give pleasure without fecundity" (*Satire VII*, French translation by Jules Lacroix, Paris, Firmin Didot, 1846).

deprived of the qualities that are assumed to belong to virility, as we have seen with the portrait given by Charles Ancillon, that quasi-contemporary of Montesquieu.⁵²

One will note, finally, that even in the *Encyclopédie* of Diderot and d'Alembert (thus long after the *Lettres persanes*), the image of the eunuch remains marked by stereotypes. On the one hand, there is a reference to the *Histoire naturelle* of Buffon, whose indignation against "these barbaric and ridiculous operations" is conveyed by the abbé Maillet, the author of the entry "Eunuque." On the other hand, one finds, in the same entry, a quasi-quotation of Tavernier, given without any critical distance, which stigmatizes the appearance of eunuchs from Africa, whose ugliness was supposedly cultivated by their masters: "One wants them to have a very flat nose, a terrible gaze, very big and very fat lips, and above all, black teeth spaced far apart from each other."⁵³ In this same article, Maillet evinces all the prejudices of his time, prejudices that we would call sexist today: "[Eunuchs] share, in all respects, the fate of women: the bodies of the former, like those of the latter, become strong only through that unique cause of growth common to both groups: consequently eunuchs remain debilitated and weak like women..."

Nothing similar in the *Lettres persanes*. Or, more exactly, their author demonstrates a forward-looking awareness of what may link the women of the seraglio, eunuchs and Black slaves, namely, the same deprivation of liberty. Of course, Montesquieu is not totally immune from what we have called, since Edward Said, "orientalist discourse"—Montesquieu's insistent critique of "oriental despotism," which he will theorize in the *Esprit des lois* (1748) and which will make him systematically (and even ontologically) associate tyrannical regimes with Asia, is proof of that. But even in that essay, where certain generalizations seem debatable to us today, one cannot help but be sensitive to the critical irony that the Enlightenment philosopher puts in the service of a freedom that he meant to be universal—think of the famous page (book XV, chapter V) where he pretends to justify "the slavery of negroes" in order the better to denounce it. The speech of the suffering eunuch, in the *Lettres persanes*, is already a sign of this *engagement* that contributes to the modernity of Montesquieu.

⁵² See above and note 20.

⁵³ *Encyclopédie* of Diderot and d'Alembert, vol. VII (1751), p. 158 and following (consulted on line).



CHAPTER 6

Gender, Race and Slavery in the Mamluk Households of Eighteenth-Century Egypt

Mary Ann Fay

My chapter examines the role of race/color in the construction of the Mamluk elite in eighteenth-century Egypt. The chapter is based on research in the archives of the Ministry of Awqaf on Mamluk women and men of the eighteenth century. Initially, my interest was in women's endowment deeds in order to learn about Mamluk women's property holdings and economic autonomy as well as their personal histories from the time they arrived in Egypt. One of the keys to understanding the individual members of the Mamluk elite, both male and female, is the way that they named themselves because their names constitute a genealogy of the individual. In their *waqfiyyat*, women's names identified them as former slave concubines, wives and widows and also in terms of their color. What was striking about their identification of themselves as *al-bayda*, the white, was first, that those identifying themselves as "white" were also the former concubines, wives and widows of high-ranking Mamluks in powerful households and who had by far the largest and most lucrative property holdings. Second, the women, former slaves, who identified themselves as *samra* (brown) or *sawda* (black) were neither concubines nor wives of

M. A. Fay (✉)
Morgan State University, Baltimore, MD, USA

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Mamluks, did not identify themselves as members of Mamluk households and had very small endowments often consisting of only one property.

The Mamluk elite, both male and female, was composed chiefly of slaves from Georgia and Circassia. Gabriel Piterberg, in his study of the origins of the beys from the ascendancy of ‘Ali Bey al-Kabir to the 1798 French invasion, demonstrates that the overwhelming majority of beys had slave origins.¹ Piterberg argues that the eighteenth-century Mamluk system relied primarily on the recruitment of slaves who were primarily Georgian in ethnicity. My research in the archives of the Ministry of Awqaf shows that the women in the Mamluk households were also former slaves, although their precise origins are not known, except for one, about whom I shall speak later.

The information about female slaves’ identification of themselves in terms of color raised certain questions for me. First was whether the Mamluk elite was selecting female slaves on the basis of color—white vs. brown or black or on the basis of ethnicity—Christians from the Caucasus speaking the same language, sharing a common cultural heritage. Second is whether the identification of slaves on the basis of color—white, brown or black—and the privileging of white slaves for assimilation into the elite means that the system was “race-based.” An even more fundamental question is whether the identification of slaves by color on their religious endowment deeds constitutes the construction of racial categories. That is, do the colors white, black and brown constitute “race” in eighteenth-century Egypt. Scholars, such as Ian Haney Lopez, have argued that race is a social construction, rather than biological, and is based on certain characteristics, among them color. However, Lopez had noted that race as a primary marker of identity also has to be encoded into law—in other words, a person is white or black by law as was the case in the U.S. South. This dimension, the legal definition and enforcement of racial identity, would seem to be missing from the use of color among slaves in eighteenth-century Egypt.

In one instance, I found some evidence of the importance of shared ethnicity in the endowment deed of a woman named Khadiga Qadin Bint ‘Abd Allah al-Bayda ma’tuqat wa zawjat al-marhoum al-Amir Ahmad Katkhuda ta’ifat Mustahfizan al-Qazdughli. In her deed, Khadiga stipulated that the administrator (*nazir*) of the endowment of her deceased husband, Ahmad Katkhuda, should go to Georgia and purchase a slave/concubine (*jariyya*) of Georgian nationality. Khadiga wanted the slave be

¹ Gabriel Piterberg, “The Formation of an Ottoman Egyptian Elite in the Eighteenth Century,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 22 (1990): 275–289.

of good character, so she required the unnamed *nazir* to look for a slave who was proper in the practice of her religion and in her everyday life. If the woman was found to be dishonorable, the *nazir* was ordered to sell her and buy another. If, on the other hand, she had the qualities mentioned above, he must manumit her and marry her. The price of the slave was set aside for this purpose. The point of the *nazir*'s journey to Georgia, his purchase of the slave and their eventual marriage was that this woman, once married and freed, would become the administrator (*nazira*) of Khadiga's endowment. Through this stipulation, Khadiga ensured that after her death, a husband and wife with whom she shared Georgian ethnicity, the experience of slavery and manumission, and the conversion from Christianity to Islam would manage her and her husband's endowments. The post of administrator (*nazir*) was a responsible one that carried with it a salary paid out of the income of the endowment. The administrator had to manage the endowed property responsibly so that it would continue to produce income, allocate the income to the heirs or the good works stipulated by the donors and in general, and fulfill the wishes of the donors as recorded in their endowment deeds. Certainly, this remarkable story tells us a great deal about the importance of ethnicity and marriage in creating strong bonds among the members of a Mamluk household.

Initially, I was focused on women in the Mamluk households when I uncovered information about how female slaves were identifying themselves according to color and that the color matched both their wealth and status, that is white = concubine, wife, wealthy and black or brown = servant, modest means. More recently, I extended my research to the male Mamluks and whether and how they identified themselves as to color. However, before discussing the results of my inquiries, I would like to say something about the data I amassed from the Ministry archives.

The records of the Ministry of Awqaf show a total of 3316 entries related to *waqf* cases during the entire Ottoman period.² The Ministry's index records the various transactions associated with the *waqfs*, including additions, deletions and changes, as well as the establishment of new *waqfs*. The Ministry's index records only those *waqfiyyat* housed in its archives. Other *waqfiyyat* as well as records of the various transactions involved in the establishment of a *waqf* can be found in other collections including the National Archives, the Dar al-Watha'iq al-Qawmiyya.

²This is according to the then director of the archives section (*daftarkhana*) of the Ministry of Awqaf, Muhammad Husam al-Din King 'Uthman.

The Ministry's index for the eighteenth century lists 522 donors of *wagfs*. Of those, male donors created 358 *wagfs* as individuals. Multiple male donors included six men creating three separate *wagfs* including two pairs of brothers and two unrelated men. The total for men endowing *wagfs* as individuals or with other men was 364. The total number of individual female donors was 97; multiple female donors included 7 women making three *wagfs* with other women for a total of 104. The women's *wagfs* with multiple female donors included one made by two sisters, a second by a woman and her two nieces and a third by a woman and her mother. In addition to *wagfs* made by men alone or with other men and women alone or with other women, eighteenth-century men and women made endowments together as groups of kin and fictive kin, that is, as freed slaves. These groups included husbands and wives, a woman with her husband and brother, a woman and her guardian, a woman and her son, and two groups of male and female freed slaves. In one of these groups, the women were freed slaves of the same master and in the second, all the men were members of the Azaban regiment, and the two women were freed slaves of Ibrahim Katkhuda Azaban. In all, there were 22 women and 32 men who created six *wagfs* with multiple donors of men and women. Thus, the total of men and women creating *wagfs* in the eighteenth century as individuals or as parts of a group was 522 including 396 men and 126 women.

The number of donors is the basis for analysis rather than the total number of *wagfs* because this allows us to determine the total number of individual women donors and the percentage of women as donors in comparison to men during the same time period. Also, some women and men made multiple endowments each of which is recorded with a separate number in the index.

Based on the total number of endowments founded by individuals, women donors were 24 percent of the total number of donors whose *wagfiyyat* can be found in the archives (*daftarkhana*) of the Ministry. That women founded 24 percent of these *wagfs* is consistent with results obtained by other researchers for both the Arab provinces and Anatolia during the Ottoman period, showing women donors from 20 to almost 37 percent of total donors. For example, Gerber's analysis of *wagf* records from fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Edirne shows that women made 20 percent of the new *wagfs*.³ Baer's analysis of the Istanbul register (*tahrir*)

³ Gerber, "The *Wagf* Institution," p. 37.

of 1546 shows that women made 36.8 percent of the new *waqfs*.⁴ Baer also cites evidence from eighteenth-century Aleppo that shows women made 36.3 percent of the *waqfs*, while in Jerusalem between 1805 and 1820, the figure is 24 percent and from Jaffa during the entire Ottoman period, the figure is 23.4 percent.⁵ Doumani's study of *waqf* donors in Nablus and Tripoli between 1800 and 1860 revealed that 11.6 percent of the *waqfs* in Nablus were made by women and 47 percent in Tripoli.⁶ The majority of *waqfs* endowed by men and women were family *waqfs*, 79 percent of 211 *waqfs* in Tripoli, and 96 per cent of 138 *waqfs* in Nablus.

The number of donors is the basis for analysis rather than the total number of *waqfs* because this allows us to determine the total number of individual women donors and the percentage of women as donors in comparison to men during the same time period. Also, some women and men made multiple endowments, each of which is recorded with a separate number in the index. For example, Al-Sitt Zaynab Khatun Bint 'Abd Allah al-Bayda, freed slave of the deceased Amir Isma'il Bey al-Kabir al-Qazdughli, owned extensive property including three *wakalas*, as well as property including shops in the elite neighborhood of al-Dawudiyya that she endowed over a period of about 30 years. The endowments are listed in the index under four separate numbers.⁷

By far the largest *waqfs* belonged to women who were former slaves and part of the Mamluk elite. Of the 126 women who endowed *waqfs* in the eighteenth century, 43 were manumitted slaves in Mamluk households or 34.1 percent. The largest number of *waqfs* was made by free-born women, 50 in total, but 32 of the 50 were small, which is defined as having one–two assets. The most common asset in small *waqfs* was usually a *makan* or a share of a *makan*. Freeborn Mamluk women, including 11 daughters and one sister, also made *waqfs*, which, while often substantial, were not as large as those of the freed slaves. For example, Al-Hajja Fatima Qadin bint 'Abd Allah al-Bayda, sister of one of the most powerful Mamluks of the eighteenth century, Muhammad Bey Abu Dhahab, made a *waqf* consisting of a sole asset, a *makan* outside of

⁴ Baer, "Women and *Waqf*," p. 10.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Beshara Doumani, "Endowing Family: *Waqf*, Property Devolution and Gender in Greater Syria, 1800–1860," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* (1998) 40: 3–41.

⁷ The numbers include 509, 510, 513 and 514 in the Ministry of Awqaf, Cairo.

Bab Zuwayla in Darb al-Ahmar.⁸ Salha Khatun daughter of Salim Agha, formerly of the Gawishan military corps, endowed six shops and a storehouse.⁹

The largest *waqfs* were endowed by freed slave women who were identified in their endowment deeds as wives of Mamluks such as Al-Sitt Ammatullah al-Bayda, freed slave and wife of ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Katkhuda who endowed a *wakala*, a *rab’* and 12 shops in Bulaq, as well as land in the province of Buhayra.¹⁰ The only freeborn woman with a *waqf* comparable to or larger than Mamluk women like Ammatullah al-Bayda was Al-Hajja Khadija Khatun daughter of the deceased Muhammad ‘Arabughli that included substantial agricultural land, much of it planted in date palms, as well as commercial investments in Cairo including a *makan* in the most prestigious eighteenth-century neighborhood of Azbakiyya and land along the lake.¹¹ For comparative purposes, large can be understood in terms of the value of the properties endowed as well as the number of properties in a single *waqf*.

Not all freed slaves had ties to Mamluk households. The index includes nine women who were former slaves of non-Mamluk men and women. For example, Ruqya Khatun bint ‘Abd Allah al-Bayda was the freed slave probably of an artisan identified as al-Haj Muhammad al-Nahhas, the coppersmith; she endowed a *makan* inside a tenement above the Suq al-Nahhas. We should regard this as a substantial investment, since the suq was the center of the copper trade and the *makan* could be used either as a workshop for a coppersmith or as shop or even a residence.

As the above examples show, freeborn women identified themselves as daughters, while freed slave women identified themselves in relationship to their former master and then to their husband. The former slave women invariably identified themselves by their color either as white, *bayda*, or black, *samra* or *sawda*. Of the 43 former slaves belonging to Mamluk households, 27 identified themselves in their names as white and two as black, while 14 had no identification as to color. The two women who identified themselves as black were Maryam al-Sawda, freed slave of ‘Ali Agha al-Jardali, who endowed a living unit in a tenement at the top of Khan al-Khalili and al-Hajja Maryam Khatun al-Samra, the freed slave of a woman,

⁸ *Waqf* 2462, Ministry of Awqaf, Cairo.

⁹ *Waqf* 1194, Ministry of Awqaf, Cairo.

¹⁰ *Waqf* 138, Ministry of Awqaf, Cairo.

¹¹ *Waqf* 500, Ministry of Awqaf, Cairo.

al-Sitt Khadija Khatun bint ‘Abd Allah al-Bayda, who was herself the freed slave of the Amir Mustafa Bey Shahin. Maryam endowed the perpetual usufructs (*khilifs*) of two *makan*. Among the non-Mamluk freed women slaves, four were white, three black and two not identified as to color.

When I turned to an analysis of the men making *waqfs* in the eighteenth century, I separated the non-Mamluks from the Mamluks, identified by their names and associations with Mamluk households or their attachment to regiments. Of the 364 men making religious endowments as individuals or with other men, 126 could be identified as members of the Mamluk elite. Of those, 41 identified themselves in their names as former slaves by using the term “ibn ‘abd-allah.” Here is one example: Isma’il Agha Ibn ‘Abd Allah ma’tuq wa khazandar ‘Ali Bey al-Kabir. Only two identified themselves in terms of color: Sulayman Agha Ibn Abd Allah al-Asmar, ma’tuq Husayn Kashif and ‘Abd Allah Agha al-Asmar ma’tuq Mustafa Kashif.

Perhaps the most famous freed slave of color named himself like this: Al-Amir Ibrahim Katkhuda al-Sinnari Katkhuda Murad Bey. Thus, he identified himself according to his origins rather than color and to his position within the household of Murad Bey, one of the last Mamluks to dominate Egypt before the 1798 invasion of Napoleon Bonaparte. Ibrahim Katkhuda’s house, which he endowed in his *waqf*, became the first home of the French Institute in Cairo.¹²

While the pattern among Mamluk women appears to be that they identify themselves as non-Muslims by birth (*bint ‘abd’allah*), according to color (*al-bayda*), as former slaves (*ma’tuqa*) and then as wives (*zawja*) or widows (*zawjat al-marhum*), men did not have a pattern other than to identify themselves according to their occupation and status within the Mamluk system and in terms of their relationship as freed slaves or clients of their patron.

Isma’il Katkhuda Azaban, who identified himself as a *tabi* or client of the deceased Ibrahim Katkhuda Mustahfizan al-Qazdughli, created an endowment consisting of several valuable properties including a house (*manzil*) in Dawudiyya near Qawsun, an elite neighborhood where many high-ranking Mamluks lived, and empty land adjacent to it where he built two houses costing 25,000 *nisf fedda* for one and 11,454 for the other.¹³ The complex of houses included eight shops and land planted in a variety

¹² *Waqf* 936, Ministry of Awqaf, Cairo.

¹³ *Waqf* 929, Ministry of Awqaf, Cairo.

of fruit trees including date palms, apricots, pomegranates and lemon. Like other Mamluk men and women, Isma'il made an *abli* or family *waqf* and named himself the beneficiary during his lifetime and also the administrator of the endowment.

The Amir 'Ali Katkhuda Mustahfizan, freed slave of Salih Galabi, created a large *waqf* comprised of land and buildings in the countryside including Qalubiyya, Mansura and Giza; *wakalas* in Suwayqat al-Izza, a commercial neighborhood between Bab Zuwayla and the Citadel, and in Qawsun and Rumayla, where he also owned a *sabil-kuttab* (combined public fountain with a Qur'anic school above), three shops, a bakery and a mill. 'Ali Katkhuda enlarged his *waqf* with several additions, each given a separate number.¹⁴ One provides insights into how property was acquired and how much it was worth. In the additions numbered 2426 and 2427, 'Ali Katkhuda bought a *makan* in the Suwayqat al-'Izza/Suq al-Silah neighborhood from Gulsan Khatun, daughter of the deceased Amir 'Ali Gurbagi, formerly of the Gamaliyan regiment and added it to his *waqf*.¹⁵ Gulsan and her sister came into possession of the property through the will of their mother Khalima Khatun, daughter of the deceased 'Ali Affandi, who was secretary (*katib*) of the Gamiliyan. After her sister's death, her half of the *makan* passed to her husband, the Amir Khalil Gurbagi, also of the Gamiliyan. Upon his death, the property reverted to Gulsan, who sold it to 'Ali Katkhuda for 300 gold dinars. This transaction shows the court's interest in proving ownership of property destined for a *waqf*, since Gulsan had to show the provenance of the *makan* and according to the endowment deed, she appeared personally in court. It also demonstrates that inheritance was one of the ways that women in well-to-do families came into possession of property. This relatively simple purchase of one property also shows the strength of the ties between members of the same household, the importance of marriage and kinship in creating cohesion and continuity between members and the way property circulated among them. All of the male principals, including the father of Gulsan and the husband of her sister, were members of the same military corps, the Gamaliyan. Another similar transaction was the purchase of a dwelling with stables and a courtyard from Mahmoud Gawish of the Gamaliyan.¹⁶ The properties were pur-

¹⁴ *Waqfs* and additions with the following numbers: 2404, 2405, 2406, 2407, 2408, 2410, 2411, 2412, 2413 and 2424 in the Ministry of Awqaf, Cairo.

¹⁵ *Waqf* 2406 and 2407, Ministry of Awqaf, Cairo.

¹⁶ *Waqf* 2408, Ministry of Awqaf, Cairo.

chased for 'Ali Katkhuda by Ahmad Gawish, also of the Gamiliyan, acting as the agent of 'Ali Katkhuda. The purchase price was 445 riyals.

'Ali Katkhuda made two stipulations in his endowment deed that show both his deference to his patron and his concern for the continuity of his household or *bayt*, the Mustahfizan. Upon the death of all the beneficiaries of his *waqf*, 'Ali Katkhuda stipulated that it should become part of the *waqf* of his former master, Salih Jalibi. Both 'Ali Katkhuda and his wife, Hanifa Qadin Bint 'Abd Allah al-Bayda, were freed slaves of Salih Jalibi. Upon the merger of the two *waqfs*, 'Ali Katkhuda wanted half of the income of his *waqf* to be used to buy slaves and weapons for the Mustahfizan and the Jawishan, with the money divided equally between the two corps. The *waqf* was dated 1178/1764.

The *waqfs* of men share certain similarities with women's endowments, namely, the mix of properties endowed, the creation of family (*ahli*) rather than pious (*khayri*) *waqfs*, which allowed them to receive the income during their lifetime, and finally, the stipulation that the donor acts as the administrator of the endowment during his lifetime. However, there is a significant difference between the endowments of women and those of men, which is the use of the endowments to strengthen the household or *bayt* to which he belonged. For example, one man, al-Amir 'Ali Katkhuda Mustahfizan, ma'tuq Salah Galabi left half of the income from his *waqf* the Mustahfizan and Gawishan. Also, he and two others whose endowments have been analyzed made stipulations that do not appear in the endowments of women in this study. All three men, possibly to ensure the cohesion of their respective households, stipulated that any of their freed slaves (*'utqa'*) who married outsiders (*ajanib*) would be penalized by the disinheriting of their children. In Ibrahim al-Sinnari's *waqf*, the stipulation is "*idha tazawwaj ahad min al-'utqa' bi-ajjabi harij 'an al-'utiq'a' wa la dakhl*," which means "if any of the freed slaves marry a stranger from outside the (group of) freed slaves and not from inside..." Isma'il Katkhuda makes it clear that the prohibition against marrying outside the household extends to both men and women by stating that "*kul rajul min 'utaga' al-waqif al-mushahhar ilayhi tazawwaj bi-ajjabiyya...wa kul imra'a min al-waqif... ilayhi tazawwaj bi-rajul ajnabi*," which means, "any man among the freed slaves of the renowned donor who marries a foreign woman...and any woman from among the freed women slaves who marries a foreign man..."

Women donors who made family *waqfs* generally named as heirs to the income after their deaths their children, husbands, brother and sisters or other relatives as well as their slaves. Most often, the stipulation was that

children, male and female, would receive equal shares and slaves, male and female, black and white, would also share equally. The *waqfs* of Ibrahim Katkhuda and Isma'il Katkhuda depart from this pattern with the stipulation concerning marriage outside the group. However, the *waqf* of 'Ali Katkhuda has two stipulations that penalize black female slaves particularly. Only black women slaves and their children would be disinherited for marrying outside the household and they inherit only half of what the white male and female slaves and the black male slaves inherit. These stipulations are unique among the eighteenth-century endowments read for this study, and the motivation behind them, as well as their objective, is unclear. In other *waqf* documents, the donors, both men and women, stipulate that for the purposes of inheritance, no distinction should be made between male and female slaves or white and black slaves.

It is possible that the stipulations concerning the marriages of freed slaves, male or female, were meant to perpetuate the master-client relationship that was supposed to endure even after a slave was manumitted. Since the Mamluk system, like the wider society, was both patriarchal and patrilocal, a freed female slave who married outside the master's household would take both her property and any children she might have to her husband's household, thereby breaking the bonds between herself, her children and her former master.

In my opinion, the Mamluk system of the eighteenth century was one of white privilege in which men and women from the Caucasus became members of the Mamluk elite. The question is whether these designations of white, brown and black indicate a race-based system of slavery or a preference for concubines, wives and cohorts who shared their ethnicity and that this led to the creation of the Mamluk elite as a quasi-caste within Egypt. Nevertheless, a system of racial privilege developed within the Mamluk slave system.



CHAPTER 7

Africans in the Palace: The Testimony of Taj al-Saltana Qajar from the Royal Harem in Iran

Anthony A. Lee

Little scholarship has been undertaken on the history of Africans in Iran.¹ This is true of the history of the Indian Ocean Diaspora in general and the Indian Ocean slave trade, especially as compared to the enormous body of

¹The only doctoral dissertation written on the history of Iranian slavery appears to be Behnaz A. Mirzai's "Slavery, the Abolition of the Slave Trade, and the Emancipation of Slaves in Iran (1828–1928)," Ph.D. dissertation, York University, Ontario, 2004, published as *A History of Slavery and Emancipation in Iran, 1800–1929* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2017). By the same author, see also "African Presence in Iran: Identity and its Reconstruction," in O. Petre-Grenouilleau, ed., *Traîtes et Esclavages: Vieux Problèmes, Nouvelles Perspectives?* (Paris: Société Française d'Histoire d'Outre-mer, 2002) pp. 229–46; and, "The Slave Trade and the African Diaspora in Iran" in Abdul Sheriff, ed., *Monsoon and Migration: Unleashing Dhow Synergies* (Zanzibar: ZIFF, 2005); also "Afro-Iranian Lives" (video). Niambi Cacchioli has also done work in this area: see, "Disputed Freedom: Fugitive Slaves, Asylum, and Manumission in Iran (1851–1913)," UNESCO website (http://portal.unesco.org/culture/en/files/38508/12480962345Disputed_Freedom.pdf/Disputed%2BFreedom.pdf). Also, my own work on enslaved Africans in Iran: Anthony A. Lee, "Enslaved African Women in Nineteenth-Century Iran: The Life of Fezzeh Khanom of Shiraz," *Iranian Studies* (May 2012); "Half the Household Was African: Recovering the

A. A. Lee (✉)

Lecturer, University of California, Los Angeles, CA, USA

scholarship now available on the Atlantic slave trade.² There are huge gaps in our knowledge of the history of slavery in Iran and of the influence of African peoples and cultures on Iranians. This article will focus on the lives of enslaved women in the palace of Nasir al-Din Shah Qajar (r. 1848–1896), in an attempt to fill one of those gaps. The memoirs³ of one of the shah's daughters, Taj al-Saltana (Crown of the monarchy) (1884–1936), provide an unexpectedly rich source of information on slavery in the royal palace. A close reading of her testimony reveals not only the presence of considerable numbers of African slaves in the royal court, but their agency in the life of the harem, in the education of children, and in affairs of state. The memoirs also suggest the influence of Africans on the personal life of the princess herself, and by extension her royal cohort. These memoirs also help us interpret other evidence of slavery in the palace of the king, specifically photographs taken during this period.

Domestic slavery had existed in Iran since medieval times.⁴ By the nineteenth century, Africans were enslaved and brought to Iran in large numbers as part of the East-African/Indian Ocean trade. While there are no definite historical statistics on the number of slaves exported from Africa to Iran, estimates among scholars for the Indian Ocean trade during the nineteenth century vary between one and two million. Possibly two-thirds

Histories of Two Enslaved Africans in Iran, Haji Mubarak and Fezzeh Khanum" in *UCLA Historical Journal*, Vol. 26 (2016) no. 1; "Recovering the Biographies of Enslaved Africans in Nineteenth-Century Iran" in *Changing Horizons of African History*, ed. Awet T. Weldemichael, Anthony A. Lee, and Edward A. Alpers (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2017); *The Baba'i Faith in Africa: Establishing a New Religious Movement, 1952–1962* (Leiden: Brill, 2011) Chapter 2.

²A few recent works on the Indian Ocean slave trade are Shihan de Silva Jayasuriya and Richard Pankhurst, eds., *The African Diaspora in the Indian Ocean* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2003); Edward A. Alpers, *East Africa and the Indian Ocean* (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2009); Robert Harms, Bernard K. Freamon, and David W. Blight, eds., *Indian Ocean Slavery in the Age of Abolition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013); Richard Allen, *European Slave Trading in the Indian Ocean, 1500–1850* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2014).

³Taj al-Saltana, *Khatirat-i Taj al-Saltana*, ed. Mansura Ettihadia (Nizam Mafi) and Sirus Sa'dvandian (Tehran, 1361 [1982]) trans. as *Crowning Anguish: Memoirs of a Persian Princess From the Harem to Modernity, 1884–1914*, Abbas Amanat, ed. (Washington, DC: Mage Publishers, 1993).

⁴On medieval slavery in Islam, see Bernard Lewis, *Race and Slavery in the Middle East: An Historical Inquiry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).

of these slaves were African women and girls, who were almost always destined for residence in wealthy Iranian households as servants and concubines.⁵

In 1868, a census conducted in Tehran revealed that 12% of the civilian population of the city was designated as African slaves and/or “household servants.”⁶ This count includes only urban households, and not slaves who were used in agricultural work, or to maintain the irrigation systems.⁷ Household servants and slaves were mostly women. This 1868 census reveals the extent of domestic slavery in large cities in nineteenth-century Iran and the importance of its African population, a subject which is invariably ignored in Iranian histories.⁸

⁵ Paul E. Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery*, Third Edition (Cambridge University Press, 2012) 60–61, 150–54; Joseph C. Miller, “Introduction,” in Gwyn Campbell, Suzanne Miers, and Joseph Calder Miller, *Women And Slavery: Africa And the Western Indian Ocean World, and the Medieval North Atlantic*. Vol. 1 (Ohio University Press, 2007) pp. 4–5; Helge Kjekshus, *Ecological Control and Development in Eastern Africa* (Nairobi: Longmans, 1979) pp. 14–16; Gwyn Campbell, introduction to *Abolition and Its Aftermath in Indian Ocean, Africa and Asia* (London: Routledge, 2005) p. 5; Gwyn Campbell, *Structure of Slavery in Indian Ocean Africa and Asia* (London: Frank Cass, 2004) p. xi.

⁶ Still, I am highly suspicious of the census category “household servants” in this context. The importation of slaves by sea had been formally outlawed by the Iranian government in 1848, but shipments of enslaved Africans had continued and even increased. Under such circumstances it may have been prudent for the wealthy to refer to their African slaves as “household servants,” especially in official matters like a census. It may have been even more prudent for the Iranian government to refer to household slaves in public documents like a census with an ambiguous designation that would attract a minimum of foreign scrutiny and condemnation.

⁷ Thomas Ricks, “Slaves and Slave Trading in Shi’i Iran, AD 1500–1900,” *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 36:4 (2001) 407–418.

⁸ It is probable that cities in the southern part of Iran, during this period, such as Shiraz or Bandar Abbas, would have had an even higher percentage of African slaves, being closer to the ports of import. Tehran may not have been so different in this regard from other world capital cities, however. The black populations of both London and Lisbon during the mid-nineteenth century were probably in this same percentage range. The black population of Lisbon may have been as high as 20%. See, for example, *Os Negros em Portugal: sécs. XV a XIX*: Mosteiro dos Jeronimos 23 de Setembro de 1999 a 24 de Janeiro de 2000 (Lisbon: Comissão Nacional para as comemorações dos descobrimentos, 1999); A.P.D.G. *Sketches of Portuguese Life, Manners, Costume, and Character* (London: G.B. Whittaker/R. Gilbert, 1826); Peter Fryer, *Staying Power: The History of Black People in Britain* (Sterling, VA: Pluto Press, 1984). I am grateful to Dr. Edward Alpers and Dr. Gregory Pirio for this information.

DAUGHTER OF THE SHAH

Taj al-Saltana was born in 1884, in the royal harem, the daughter of Nasir al-Din Shah and Turan al-Saltana, one of the king's minor wives⁹ and his paternal cousin. The daughter was raised in the enclosed women's quarters (*andarun*) of the king's palace by servants and African slaves. As the daughter of the king, she lived in the most wealthy and privileged circumstances possible. As was customary, she was housed with female servants in a separate residence from her mother and father. Twice a day, if permission was given, she would visit her mother. Similarly, she might visit her father once a day. At the age of eight, her parents arranged for her engagement to the son of an important military officer, who was also eight.¹⁰ But her father insisted that the marriage be delayed until his daughter became 20. Nonetheless, after Nasir al-Din Shah was assassinated (1896), she was married at 13 years old to her barely teenaged husband. The marriage was unhappy from the start. Her husband eventually pursued multiple affairs with both men and women. Taj al-Saltana experienced long periods of deep depression and attempted suicide three times by poison.¹¹ Eventually, the couple was divorced. The princess, with a royal pension, managed to live independently for some time. She pursued a scandalous lifestyle, patronized the arts, advocated for constitutionalism, and supported liberal causes such as the emancipation of women. She has left the only account of the royal harem that was written by a woman in her time. She seems to have been a deeply unhappy person caught between the demands of traditional, conservative Iranian culture and the emerging possibilities of modernity within an ever more secular society. Nonetheless, her strength of character and her independence of mind can perhaps be traced back to her training at the knee of her enslaved African nanny.

⁹Through a *mut'ah* marriage, a "temporary marriage" in Shi'i religious law. That is, a wife taken in addition to the shah's four "legal wives."

¹⁰Amir Husayn Khan Shuja' al-Saltana.

¹¹Biographical information on Taj al-Saltana is gleaned from her autobiography and from Abbas Amanat, "The Changing World of Taj al-Saltana" in *Crowning Anguish*; Shireen Mahdavi, "Taj al-Saltaneeh, an Emancipated Qajar Princess," *Middle Eastern Studies* 23:2 (1987) 188–193; and Anna Vanzan, "The Memoirs of Taj al-Saltaneh: A Window onto the Qajar Period," *Iranshenasi* 2/4 (1991) 91–107. See also Afsaneh Najmabadi, "A Different Voice: Tāj os-Saltāna," in *Women's Autobiographies in Contemporary Iran*, ed. Afsaneh Najmabadi (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990) 17–31, and Afsaneh Najmabadi, *Women with Mustaches and Men without Beards: Gender and Sexual Anxieties of Iranian Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

By all accounts, Taj al-Saltana was the most beautiful woman of her time among the aristocratic women in the royal court. Yet, there appear to be only five or six images of the princess that are available.¹² Three of them are included in the English translation of her memoirs, *Crowning Anguish: Memoirs of a Persian Princess from the Harem to Modernity*, edited by Abbas Amanat. The first (Fig. 7.1) is a photograph of a young woman clearly derived from a newspaper clipping, since the printer's dots

Fig. 7.1 Taj al-Saltana as a young woman, apparently taken from a newspaper clipping. (Source: *Crowning Anguish*, 311)



¹²Two images I have included in this article as Figs. 7.1 and 7.2. Another photograph of Taj al-Saltana as a young woman can be found at www.pinterest.com. An older photo is displayed at www.payvand.com. A photograph of Taj al-Saltana taken when she was eight years old, on the occasion of her engagement to her future husband, can be found online at: <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Taj-al-Saltaneh.jpg>. Jackson Armstrong-Ingram has discussed another image, a painting of Taj al-Saltana standing, wearing “traditional” dress. But I have been unable to find it (Jackson Armstrong-Ingram, “Women in Late Qajar Urban Society: The View from the Lens.” Unpublished paper. Armstrong-Ingram papers. Los Angeles Baha’i Archives).

are visible in the reproduction.¹³ The headshot shows a rather stout woman in her 20s, dressed in European clothing, with long dark hair styled in European fashion. She has an impressive lace covering over her high-collared top. She is wearing lipstick and eye make-up and jeweled earrings. The young woman is quite handsome, but surprisingly ordinary by modern standards. She seems self-aware and self-possessed as she stares boldly into the camera.

The second image (Fig. 7.2) is a painting, used as the frontispiece of the same published memoir.¹⁴ The painting is obviously based on the newspaper photograph just described, since Taj al-Saltana's expression, hairstyle, and high collar are identical. So, the image was not painted from

Fig. 7.2 Painting of Taj al-Saltana. (Source: *Crowning Anguish*, frontispiece)



¹³ Taj al-Saltana, *Crowning Anguish*, 311.

¹⁴ Another image (not shown), which I only presume to be Taj al-Saltana, appears on the back cover of the dust jacket of the English memoirs, though it is not identified in any way.

life. The photo provided the “sitting” for the painter. However, the artist here seems to have wanted to depict a somewhat older woman.¹⁵

RAISED BY AFRICANS

Taj al-Saltana begins her memoir with a description of her childhood. She says that she was placed in the care of a wet nurse (*dayeh*), an Iranian woman “from the middle ranks of society”; and two nannies, an African nanny (*dadeh*) and an Iranian nursemaid (*naneh*). She explains that her nanny specifically had to be an African woman, “since honor and grandeur at that time were measured by ownership of creatures whom God has made no differently from others, except for the color of their skin.” For this reason, the princess was surrounded in the harem by enslaved African attendants: a female cradle rocker, a valet, a chamberlain, a washer woman, and so forth. She explains that “... theirs was the task of educating me and bringing me up.”¹⁶ We can assume that the other children of the shah were given the same cadre of slaves and attendants. These servants formed a social unit with the child in their care at its center. The primary social and familial bonds that the child experienced, and the child’s primary emotional attachments of love and affection, were naturally forged with these servants. This was certainly true for Taj al-Saltana.

The princess never had a chance to form any maternal bond with the woman who bore her, her royal mother, who was preoccupied with the affairs of the court. Her daughter seems to accept this fact without too much bitterness. Nonetheless, she states frankly: “... being a good princess [that is, a good royal consort] does not necessarily translate into being a good mother. [My mother] lacked the qualities required of motherhood.”

¹⁵ The artist has added deep lines in the face and, to my eye at least, given her a sad, drooping expression that is not found in the photo. Most curiously, in the painting, she is wearing an antique European frock and dress that may have been stylish in Europe in the nineteenth century, but would have been older than she was when the picture was created (I am grateful to Jackson Armstrong-Ingram for this insight.) There are other odd aspects of the painting: Her right arm is peculiarly foreshortened as it hangs to her side. Her left arm rests on a table with Muslim prayer beads wrapped around her wrist as a bracelet. The head and neck are strangely out of place on the body, as though added to the painting as an afterthought. Or perhaps Taj al-Saltana’s face and head were painted over the portrait of another woman, whose body remains in the clothing of an earlier century. This impression is reinforced by the fact that the head in the painting is too big in proportion to the body, and the body itself is much thinner than we would expect.

¹⁶ Taj al-Saltana, *Crowning Anguish*, 112–113; Mahdavi, “Emancipated Qajar princess,” 188.

Therefore, Taj al-Saltana, from earliest infancy, bonded with her African nanny instead of with her mother. In her memoirs, as she relates her childhood experiences, she deliberately and consciously substitutes a description of her enslaved nanny and her affection for her for the description of her mother and their relationship: She describes her nanny in detail:

About forty or forty-five years of age, of average height, this woman had a very dark face with large eyes. She was generally reticent, but on the few occasions that she did speak her speech was crude and harsh. This dear nanny of mine, having also brought up my mother, had risen to the rank of "Matron Nanny."¹⁷

There is no such detailed description of Taj al-Saltana's mother. The memoirs relate that the little princess preferred her nanny to her mother, whom she would not allow to hug her or kiss her, running away from her mother "to the refuge of my nanny's arms." The emotional bond with her nanny became the princess's primary relationship, and it seems her only source of familial affection and support. She says:

She was very affectionate to me and very formal and serious with others. I had grown so accustomed to her presence that, despite her fearsome looks and dreadful physique, if she was parted from me for a day, I cried the entire time and nothing could console me. I never left her side, and there was no remedy for being apart from her.¹⁸

More remarkably, perhaps, Taj al-Saltana relates that she imitated her nanny's speech. Her first language was the Afro-Persian dialect that her father's black slaves spoke. Taj al-Saltana remained fluent in this language for the rest of her life and formed a permanent bond of kinship with her nanny's relatives. She seems to have identified herself with Africans and with Afro-Iranian culture. "Thus it is," she says, "that, to this day, in memory of my beloved nanny, I am averse to fair-skinned people while having a special regard for tawnier faces."¹⁹

Moreover, the memoirs provide abundant evidence of the active agency of enslaved African women within the harem. Taj al-Saltana's nanny, for

¹⁷ Taj al-Saltana, *Crowning Anguish*, 114. The "crude and harsh" speech probably refers to the Matron Nanny's Afro-Persian dialect. For another discussion of an enslaved African woman in the royal court, Sonbol Baji, and her later role as a nanny in an elite Iranian household in the twentieth century, see Haleh Afshar, "Age, Gender and Slavery in and out of the Persian Harem: A Different Story," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 23, no. 5 (2000) 905–916.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

instance, occupied a position of considerable power in the world of the harem. As the memoirs relate: “Wielding a good deal of authority, she [the Matron Nanny] had complete control over the food and drink supplies and the cellar, and enjoyed numerous privileges.” The other nannies in the royal court were under her command. This testimony gives a glimpse of a system of hierarchy and rank among the enslaved women in the harem. There is virtually no other information about these relationships. But, as observed below, photographs from the period seem to confirm that there was a system of ranking that functioned among the slaves.

Since enslaved Africans were regarded as luxuries necessary for the display of the opulence and wealth expected of the shah’s royal court, there were many of them in the palace. Africans were especially numerous in the women’s quarters (*andarun*). Taj al-Saltana relates in her memoirs that her father, Nasir al-Din Shah, had 80 wives and concubines.²⁰ Each of these women had 10 or 20 maidservants to wait on them. Therefore, the number of women living in the shah’s harem was between 500 and 600. The memoir does not say how many of these were Africans. However, Taj al-Saltana does note that only seven or eight of the king’s wives ever had children by him. The rest remained childless, and presumably were seldom invited to the royal bedchambers. The African attendants to the royal wives were not the king’s sexual partners.

READING THE PHOTOGRAPHIC EVIDENCE

An early photograph (Fig. 7.3)²¹ of what appears to be a family group surrounding a seated child wearing sumptuous clothing, taken in the court of Nasir al-Din Shah, provides further evidence of the role of African slaves

²⁰ Some sources report the number of the shah’s wives to be much greater. Mirzai suggests that after Nasir al-Din Shah’s assassination, he was survived by 500 wives and concubines. However, this number probably reflects the number of all of the residents of the shah’s harem, most of whom were slaves and servants of the royal women and not the king’s wives or concubines (Mirzai, *History of Slavery*, 116–117). Anna Vanzan maintains, concerning Nasir al-Din Shah, that “in the course of his life he married some hundreds of wives.” These would not all have lived in the royal harem at the same time (*Encyclopedia Iranica*, s.v. “Harem ii. In the Qajar Period”).

²¹ Pedram Khosronejad (Oklahoma State University) has recently collected over 600 photographs of African slaves in Iran from the Qajar period (Illustrated lecture at UCLA, May 2017). See Pedram Khosronejad, *Untold Stories: The socio-cultural life of images in Qajar Era Iran*, Iranian Studies Series (Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2015).



Fig. 7.3 The young E'temad al-Dowleh (later, Muzaffar al-Din Shah), the son of Nasir al-Din Shah, surrounded by aristocratic relatives and enslaved African women. (Source: Middle East Eye. <http://www.middleeasteye.net/in-depth/features/they-are-iranian-discovering-african-history-and-slavery-iran-970665328>)

in the rearing of royal children. There are ten people in the photo. The child, no more than a toddler, is seated stiffly on a chair in the middle of the group. The name *E'temad al-Dowleh* (Trustee of the Realm), a royal title which could only be given by the shah, is written on the photo below the boy's image. He is the king's eldest son, the future Mozafar al-Din Shah.²² He is dressed in the most expensive brocade clothing and a richly decorated hat, which would indicate royal birth. It is clear by his garb and pose that this child is meant to command the utmost deference and respect from the viewer. Strangely, the child's eyes are closed, and he may even be asleep. Photographic exposures of the time took a minute or two, and it would have been difficult to keep a child of this age still for that long. So, the group may have resorted to posing him while he was napping.

²²The child is identified as "Mozafar al-Din Shah in childhood" by Ali Mohammad Tarafdari in "Photography and recognizing historical changes of the Qajar era: a new historical view" in Khosronejad, *Untold Stories*, 47; Yahya Zuka, *Tarikh-i 'akkasi va 'akkasan-i pishgam dar Iran* (History of Photography and Pioneering Photographers in Iran) (Tehran: Elmi Farangi Publications, 1997) 27. Muzaffar al-Din Shah was born in 1853.

The boy is surrounded by five elite Iranian adults and four African women, who are clearly enslaved servants of the child. The men wear rich clothing and unusually tall, dark hats (*kolah-e Qajari*), that indicate they are courtiers or royal officials. The elite women wear dark headscarves typical of indoor dress for women during the Qajar period.²³ Although the Iranian adults may be relatives, they do not seem to be posed as the parents of the child. There is no hint of parental authority, protection, or control. It would appear that the boy's parents are not in the photo. Nonetheless, the photograph portrays a social unit with the child at its center that cuts across the boundaries of race, class, gender, and enslaved status. The image documents a network of primary relationships surrounding the child.

On both sides, literally on the margins of the photo, but important enough to be included as a necessary part of the tableau, are the enslaved African women. The two on the right are seated, while those on the left are standing. The two on the right wear white headscarves, as opposed to the dark ones worn by the Iranian women. The women who are standing wear no head coverings at all. Clothing signifies rank here. This difference in clothing and pose suggests that a hierarchy among the female African slaves, with those on the right (and seated) enjoying a higher status. We know nothing about this system of ranking. Possibly, since their hair is not covered, the lower ranked women may not have been considered to be Muslims. What is clearly shown is that the child had at least four African attendants. This would be expected from Taj al-Saltana's description of the several enslaved Africans who cared for her—the nanny, the cradle rocker, and so on.

The inclusion of slaves in the formal royal photo confirms that indeed Africans were needed to display the wealth and luxury of the shah's palace. They frame the aristocrats in the photo. As such, perhaps the slave women are being used here as only decorative objects intended to enhance the prestige of the Iranian group. However, the photo also documents the fact that these slaves were enmeshed in a family unit in which they interacted and functioned. The African presence was a vital and necessary part of the young boy's community. Indeed, the African women may have had more

²³ G. M. Vogelsang-Eastwood and L. A. Ferydoun Barjesteh van Waalwijk van Doorn, *An Introduction to Qajar Era Dress* (Rotterdam: Uitgeversmaatschappij, 2002) 28–30, 34–39.

Fig. 7.4 Agha Mehrab, an African Eunuch in the Harem of Nasir al-Din Shah. (Source: Mirzai, *History of Slavery*, 110. From the Golestan Palace)



contact and connection to him that anyone else in the picture, as was the case for Taj al-Saltana. Similarly, we might expect that the boy's earliest and closest bonds of maternal love and affection were forged with his African nannies (Fig. 7.4).

GENDERLESS MEN

Taj al-Saltana also provides us with a detailed pen-portrait of another African slave in the palace, Agha Nuri, the chief eunuch in charge of the harem, whom she clearly despised. Agha Nuri provides another example of African agency within the shah's court. The memoir documents his power over the women in the harem, even making decisions affecting life and death:

About forty years of age, he was sallow-complexioned, ugly and repulsive, and had a strident voice. When he announced the *goroq* [the closing of the harem at the end of the day], especially, his voice could be heard from a great distance. He wore a white sash around his perpetually dirty blue frock

from which hung and enormous bunch of keys, and he carried a study cane in his hands. Exceptionally cruel and fearless, he treated everyone with a cold reserve. He had special charge of the entrance to the *andarun* and jealously watched all comings and goings....

Illiterate in Persian, all he had learned was the Koran, so that he could recite from it aloud when he was not busy.... From a young age he had cultivated the soul of cruelty and despotism as his second nature, and this rigidity and harshness had raised him to higher positions and given him the authority to command.²⁴

She goes on to relate an example of the eunuch's cruelty. But this story also illustrates the remarkable power and authority of an enslaved eunuch charged with enforcing the rigid rules of gender segregation in the palace. A lady in the harem was deathly ill and needed to see a doctor urgently. However, Agha Nuri happened to be in the bath house and would not be disturbed. The sick woman died without a doctor's visit, because it was unthinkable that a man should enter the shah's harem unless accompanied by Agha Nuri.²⁵

Enslaved eunuchs were necessary to the basic functioning of the king's harem. Their genderless status allowed them to remain inside the *andarun*, which was a gender-restricted area normally off limits to all men, except to the shah and his closest relatives. Eunuchs were charged with guarding the boundaries of the harem and thereby protecting the honor and dignity of the sovereign. The prestige of the king depended on maintaining a public image of wealth, opulence, power, and strict religious observance within the palace. This was supported, in large part, by his reputation for maintaining an enormous harem that was well guarded and controlled by eunuch slaves who insured that the royal women remained beyond reproach. Eunuchs within the palace were placed in positions of responsibility and trust. They performed administrative functions, keeping records and distributing allowances to the shah's wives and concubines. They received considerable amounts of money as allowances themselves.²⁶ Their intermediate status as genderless slaves allowed them to remain present in the harem, serve the royal women, and mediate with the outside world as caretakers, guards, messengers, and interlocutors—all the while preserving a public façade of spotless purity and chastity within the royal family.

²⁴ Taj al-Saltana, *Crowning Anguish*, 122.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 123–24.

²⁶ Mirzai, *History of Slavery*, 109–114.

According to Taj al-Saltana's memoirs, 30 or 40 enslaved African eunuchs were retained as guardians of the royal women in Nasir al-Din Shah's harem. Other reports suggest that the number was much larger. The shah's French physician, Jean-Baptiste Feuvrier, reported that from 1889 to 1895, the number of eunuchs in the harem increased from 40 to 100. Each of the highest ranked wives of the king had three or four of these neutered men in their service. Lesser wives had one or two.²⁷ Other eunuchs performed administrative and security functions.

Women were not permitted to exit the harem grounds without being veiled and accompanied by a eunuch. As with the aborted visit of the physician, which Taj al-Sultana laments, no common man could enter the harem unless accompanied by a eunuch. Before any male could enter the *andarun*, the chief eunuch had to announce the *qoroq*, which required all women in the harem to return to their quarters and remain indoors and out of sight until the order was lifted. This could cause considerable inconvenience to the shah's women, who complained about their arbitrary confinement. Nonetheless, the chief eunuch's order was law. Similarly, at the end of the day, the eunuch would order all visiting women who were not overnight guests or residents of the harem to exit the *andarun*.²⁸

THE POWER OF THE HAREM

Nasir al-Din Shah ruled Iran as a traditional monarch who embodied the state in his person. The seat of government was his royal palace, and the members of his family were its functionaries. As such, the women of the royal harem were situated at the center of state power, and their political influence was enormous. Not only did they have the ear of the shah every day, but they had access to royal allowances that amounted to large amounts of money. They cultivated networks of influence that could occasionally foil the plans of the king himself.²⁹ Notoriously, for example, the women of the harem joined the nationwide popular protest against a sweeping economic concession granted by the shah to a British company (the Regie Concession). They participated in the boycott of all tobacco

²⁷ Ibid., 111.

²⁸ Ibid., 103.

²⁹ For a discussion of the importance of the royal harem and the crucial roles of wives, concubines, enslaved women, and enslaved eunuchs, see: Mirzai, *History of Slavery*, 102–114; Afshar, "Age, Gender and Slavery."

products, as ordered by the protesting faction of ulama (1891). This greatly alarmed Nasir al-Din Shah, since he knew that the royal women were addicted to the water-pipe. The shah's favorite wife, Anis al-Dowleh, boldly informed him that she supported the boycott and had enforced the ban in the harem. She joined forces with the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mirza Sa'id Khan, and various princes and clerics against the concession. She invited some from this group to stage a sit-in (*bast*) at her house in the king's palace. They demanded that the concession be cancelled and the Prime Minister, Mirza Husayn Khan, be dismissed. The shah was forced to grant both demands.³⁰ Of course, this capitulation was not accomplished by the harem alone. But the royal women, especially Anis al-Dowleh, played an important role in the protest movement.

Also situated at the center of political power, that is, in the shah's palace, were the enslaved African women who served the king's wives and children. It should not be imagined that they were without agency of their own. Taj al-Saltana's memoirs provide us with many examples of slaves as actors within the harem. Since these memoirs are the only record left by a royal woman that describes life in the *andarun* of Nasir al-Din Shah, and since the writer devotes a remarkable amount of space to a description of enslaved Africans, the text deserves close scrutiny by anyone interested in the African Diaspora in Iran.

THE EDUCATION OF THE ROYAL CHILDREN

The education of children in the shah's palace was informal and rudimentary. Up to the end of the nineteenth century, there was no Western curriculum offered to the royal offspring. There was no schooling at all, beyond the traditional *maktab* that taught perfunctory literacy in Persian and Arabic.³¹ The education of princes and princesses was largely in the hands of their African nannies during their formative years. The memoir recounts that the girls of the harem especially were lacking formal education: "These girls were all deprived of education and manners. Their talk

³⁰ Abbas Amanat, *Pivot of the Universe: Nasir al-Din Shah and the Iranian Monarchy, 1831–1896* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997) 413, 437; Amanat, "The Changing World," 73–74; Vanzan, "The Memoirs," 93; Nikki Keddie, *Roots of Revolution* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981) 58–60.

³¹ Amanat, "The Changing World," 35–36.

was very simple and slang-ridden.”³² Since the Matron Nanny was her only teacher, perhaps, we should attribute some of Taj al-Saltana’s independent and rebellious spirit to her early training and education by an African woman.³³

The enslaved women who were placed in charge of the king’s children had almost complete control of their early education. Their superstitions and beliefs became the superstitions and beliefs of the ones under their care. Taj al-Saltana’s memoirs reveal that she was 18 years old before one of her male relatives suggested a more scientific view of the world. He challenged her traditional ideas, encouraged her to learn French, and introduced her to European literature. The memoirs confess:

Right up to my eighteenth year, I had held the beliefs taught me by my nanny that the heaven were pulled by a chain in an angel’s hand, or that when God’s wrath was incurred, the sound of thunder came. This esteemed teacher of mine, however, told me, “This is all absurd. Thunder and lightning are generated through collision of clouds,” and gave me the scientific proofs. Or he said, “You claim the earth rests on a yellow bull’s horn. That’s false. The earth is spherical and rests on nothing.”³⁴

Princesses without Western-educated relatives presumably continued to share their nannies’ worldview for the rest of their lives.

But Taj al-Saltana observes that nannies could have a negative effect on their young children. Though she was hardly a neutral observer, she attributes her troubled marriage and her husband’s quarrelsome nature to his nanny’s poor child rearing. She was engaged to her husband from childhood. So she observed his relationship to his nanny.

³² Taj al-Saltana, *Crowning Anguish*, 120. Perhaps the “slang” mentioned here may refer to the influence of the Afro-Persian language that the African servants spoke.

³³ Some women in the royal harem were able to access higher levels of education, probably through private tutors. Muhammad-Hasan E’temad al-Saltana mentions 40 court women who were educated, wrote poetry and prose, learned foreign languages, and studied calligraphy and painting (*Encyclopedia Iranica* [online], s.v. “Education xxv. Women’s Education in the Qajar Period” [by Afsaneh Najmabadi]). Taj al-Saltana may have had private tutors in the harem, though she does not mention them.

³⁴ Ibid., 309. That the earth ultimately rests on a bull’s horn was a common belief supported by traditions recorded in Shi’i collections of hadith. This topic is still the subject of lively debate among Muslims online. See, for example: <http://www.shiachat.com/forum/topic/235024448-is-this-hadith-really-sahih/>

The seditious intriguer in all this was the black nanny who had raised my husband after his mother's death. She would make the child get into physical fights with slave girls and then kiss them in my presence. She would see that this made me very unhappy. Or she would keep him confined to the *birun* [the men's quarters, the public sections of the palace] and not allow him into the *andarun* [where Taj al-Saltana was confined]. If he had to leave the *birun* out of fear of his father, she would take the child into her own room and put him to sleep in her arms. She did not do it out of antagonism toward me. I found out later that it was in this nanny's character to be a trouble-maker and her habit to make mischief.³⁵

These traits of character were passed on to her charge, according to Taj al-Saltana. She also suggests that her husband's first sexual experiences were with his nanny, who took the pre-pubescent boy to her bed.³⁶

Such reports disrupt the stereotypical notions of the harem as a place of strict sexual discipline, with the king's women kept sternly under control by ferocious African eunuchs and dutiful enslaved black chaperons. There is enough evidence to uncover a history of illicit love affairs, lesbian relationships, castrated (but still sexually active) eunuchs sleeping with royal concubines, lovers escaping over the walls of the *andarun*, and so forth.³⁷ As long as the fiction of the religiously observant, inviolable, walled-off harem was maintained, the shah was willing to overlook minor peccadillos. Enslaved Africans in the women's quarters of the palace, therefore, were more or less free to do as they pleased. Their personal agency could, and did, extend to sexual relationships.

BACCHANALIAN REVERSAL IN THE COURT

One of the many travesties to be found in the court of Nasir al-Din Shah during the latter years of his reign was an especially vulgar and violent game that he liked to play at night when he was alone with the women in the harem. Perhaps not incidentally, this game afforded the enslaved African women in the palace the opportunity of agency and independent action for a few hours. Taj al-Saltana explains that the palace had been newly fitted with electric lights. The king would announce the game and call all of the harem into a large hall. Women of noble birth, and anyone

³⁵ Ibid., 244.

³⁶ Amanat, "The Changing World," 46.

³⁷ Ibid., 41.

who valued her dignity, would decline to attend. The less particular would gather in the middle of the room conversing pleasantly. When the lights were turned out, the women had absolute freedom to do as they wished to one another. They were encouraged to take out their aggressions by pulling hair, beating, biting, and kicking anyone they were angry with or jealous of.

At the beginning of the game the ladies would all sit in the middle of the hall, talking among themselves. My father would sit on a chair near the light switch. As they were busy in their conversation, he would turn out the light. Suddenly all hell would break loose. Screams, cries for help, oaths, curses and wailing would be heard everywhere.... Amid this pandemonium of keening and wailing whose effect was heightened by the absolute darkness—presenting a bizarre spectacle to the observer, as of a corner of hell in which a thousand perils awaited man—the lights would suddenly come back on, catching everyone in the act. Usually the clothes would be ripped to shreds, the faces and cheeks bloody, the bodies obscenely exposed ...³⁸

As soon as the lights went on, everyone would start laughing and would resume the normal decorum of the court—until the lights went out again. Slaves took part in these melees, attacking whomever they disliked. Taj al-Saltana describes her own harrowing experience of being assaulted and almost choked to death by a Kurdish slave who was in the service of one of her sisters.³⁹ This game allowed a bacchanalian reversal of status that even allowed for slaves to molest the king's consorts. It also provided for a release of tensions and frustrations within the stifling, enclosed space of the *andarun*. As Taj al-Saltana observes, it was, in addition, a subtle way for the king to map the rivalries and antagonisms that existed among the women in his household.⁴⁰

THWARTING THE WILL OF THE SOVEREIGN

One remarkable episode recounted in the memoirs of Taj al-Saltana demonstrates the power that African slaves might exercise as parties to the endless palace intrigues that surrounded the shah. The king's favorite child in the harem was Malijak (Aziz al-Sultan, meaning, Favorite of the

³⁸ Taj al-Saltana, *Crowning Anguish*, 196–98.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 198–99.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 196.

king), the son of a page boy that the shah had married off to one of his concubines. He was indulged by the king from birth and was given no discipline whatsoever. He was universally despised by the court. He was a spoiled child, uncommonly short, with a chronic infection that caused his eyes to appear red and encrusted. He was always filthy, a stutterer, with a vulgar mouth and riotous behavior. He was violent, known to throw stones and dirt clods at the ladies in the harem for his amusement, shooting and wounding eunuchs for fun. Everyone regarded him as an embarrassment to the dignity of the palace. Yet, Nasir al-Din Shah continued to indulge him in every way, forbidding anyone to correct him, and encouraging his pranks and obscenities.

When Taj al-Saltana was about eight years old, she was nearing the time of her betrothal to a suitable future husband of about her age. She was regarded as the most beautiful girl in the harem and her father had chosen her to be Malijak's wife. This must have been well known. One of the royal wives, however, was determined to put her daughter forward as a candidate for betrothal to the king's favorite brat. This could not be accomplished without the cooperation of Malijak's nanny, who had to be won over. The mother cajoled, threatened, and bribed the nanny until she accepted to become a part of her scheme. The African caretaker then went about convincing Malijak to choose this mother's daughter as his fiancé, rather than the king's preferred choice, Taj al-Saltana.

The day of the betrothal could not have been more dramatic. A number of eunuchs entered the harem carrying covered trays. When the veils were lifted, the trays were seen to be filled with jewelry, gems, exotic dolls, and toys. With great ceremony, the king entered the room to announce that all of these treasures belonged to Malijak. He was instructed to give them to any girl he wished, who would become his betrothed. As he had been instructed to do by his nanny, Malijak chose Taj al-Saltana's half-sister instead of her, which ruined the shah's plan. The king took the young boy in his arms and explained to him publicly that he had chosen Taj al-Saltana to be his wife.

At that point, Taj al-Saltana writes in her memoirs: "My mother who was present shouted, "Oh, I would sooner poison my daughter and end her life than consent to such a son-in-law. Isn't it a pity to give my darling, sweet girl to this child whose parentage is well known and whose appearance is so repulsive.'" Pandemonium broke out, and the king began shouting thunderously. As he bellowed, Taj al-Saltana's mother was hustled out of the area, despite her continued loud protests. When order was restored,

the king asked Malijak to choose again. But he persisted in following his nanny's instructions rather than the wishes of the king. He said, "I w-w-want the same g-g-girl. I d-d-d-don't want this g-g-g-girl!" To the king's dismay, all of the trays with their treasures were then carried to the home of Taj al-Saltana's half-sister.⁴¹

We must note here that the influence of Malijak's nanny was powerful enough on this occasion to thwart the wishes of the sovereign. This incident certainly interrogates, if it does not overthrow entirely, the common stereotype of the African household slave as an abject and powerless victim. The enslaved women of the royal house, despite the fact that they were confined and certainly victimized on occasion, were still able to exercise choices and find room to maneuver within the palace walls. Malijak's nanny was the king's slave. Nonetheless, she was able to defy her master; her scheme overturned his clear intentions. But this incident might be taken as only an example of the kind of power that African nannies could have over the children in their care, a power which they exercised regularly in less dramatic ways. Such an insight should point us in the direction of conducting further research on the influence of African culture on the wealthy classes in Iran, and especially on the royal family.

THE SECRET OF WELL-BEING

Taj al-Saltana's mother seems to have blamed her for the events that took place during this unhappy and chaotic incident. She told her daughter to go live with her father. Or if she wanted to stay at home, not see her father again. Of course, the young child was distraught. She went to her room terrified and sobbing. Her black nanny, who had not witnessed the day's events, entered the room and asked her what was wrong. When Taj al-Saltana told her what had happened, she let out a moan. She then spoke some words which the princess has preserved for posterity. She said:

In order to be happy in life, it's not enough for one to enjoy a high position or belong to royalty or be as pretty as you are. Many other things are necessary for well-being which I will teach you if I live long enough.⁴²

⁴¹ Ibid., 141–42.

⁴² Ibid., 143.

Words such of these might indeed have been spoken by any enslaved person in the world. The personal imperative of any slave is to learn skills of survival and psychological well-being, to reject hopelessness and despair, and to ward off suicide as a viable option, in short, to cultivate an attitude of resistance. Undoubtedly, the Matron Nanny had learned these skills herself and now promised to teach them to the princess.⁴³ These words made such an impression on Taj al-Saltana that she quotes them directly in her memoir.⁴⁴ This is the only moment in the book when we hear the African voice recorded. As such, it should be regarded as highly significant. The nanny intended to teach her charge how to be an independent, self-possessed, detached, disciplined, and even defiant woman, how to create her own happiness, and how to maintain her psychological equilibrium under conditions of extreme oppression. It seems that her charge learned these lessons well. Taj al-Saltana went on to reject the constraints of traditional culture, embrace modernity, and accept the value of European ideas.

THE AFRICAN PRESENCE IN WEALTHY HOMES

Taj al-Saltana's nanny and her husband's nanny, both of whom remain nameless in the memoirs, followed the couple into their new household after their marriage. It seems that the former passed away not too long after. Taj laments the fact that her nanny did not live to have a stronger influence on her life. On the other hand, she had nothing but contempt for her husband's nanny, as we have seen earlier. She blamed her for her husband's brutish character, and indirectly for the failure of her marriage. She says:

The boy's nanny was a replica of mine [i.e., She was an older enslaved African woman], with the difference that ... his nanny lived long and caused me suffering and provoked my revulsion for many years. Imparting all her uncivilized manners to this unfortunate child, she had raised him to be stubborn, brutish, and ruthless. Everything that one can identify as bad she had taught him, leaving behind a permanent token of herself.⁴⁵

⁴³ Here, my analysis of slave mentality is influenced by Cornel West's essay on the African American experience, "Black Strivings in a Twilight Civilization," in *The Future of the Race*, ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and Cornel West (New York: Knopf, 1996).

⁴⁴ Of course, the quote is a paraphrase of the nanny's words as Taj al-Saltana remembered them many years later.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 159.

Taj al-Saltana had no question that this person had a strong negative influence on her husband into his adolescence and adulthood. Of course, this attitude was certainly colored by the unhappy course of her marriage and her eventual divorce. She also believed that this slave woman had an influence on her own life, during the time she lived in her household. She recognized the individuality and agency of slaves and that their actions could be beneficial or deleterious. This could be said for other nannies in the palace caring for the royal children, and in other wealthy households. These nannies would normally remain with their charges for life. Again, Taj al-Saltana provides us with an example of African slaves enmeshed in a family unit of which they were an integral part and in which they interacted daily. This African presence has usually been ignored by historians.

CONCLUSIONS

It is difficult to assess the role that Taj al-Saltana's nanny may have played in the princess's adult life and in the radical choices she eventually made for herself. It is even more difficult to untangle the influences of Afro-Iranian culture on this nanny and her charges. All we can say, at this point, is that such influences could not have been absent.

What we can say with certainty, from the evidence provided by Taj al-Saltana, is that enslaved African women cannot be regarded as having been passive or inactive in life at court or in the households of wealthy families. They were fully integrated into the social life of the royal harem, not as equals, but clearly as significant actors exercising individual agency. The complex network of social relationships and intrigues that made up life in the royal court included Africans. The African nannies in the Qajar palace formed the first bonds (sometimes the only bonds) of familial affection that the king's children knew. These bonds continued into adulthood. Enslaved women and enslaved eunuchs, despite their status, exercised considerable power within the world of the *andarun*. They had enormous influence over the rearing of children who were destined to become wealthy aristocrats as adults. They participated in the struggles for power within the king's harem, affecting the balance of power among the royal women, and occasionally—but ultimately—influencing the actions of the king himself.

So far, this African influences on the Iranian court has gone unnoticed and unexplored. Taj al-Saltana's memoirs give us a window into this world of wives, concubines, enslaved women, eunuchs, children, and palace

intrigue. But it is not the only one. Historians of Iranian history and of the African Diaspora in the Indian Ocean world must now feel challenged to find new sources of information—other memoirs, letters, diaries, European reports, photographs, and so on. More broadly, and more significantly, the influence of African people on the history of Iran in general has gone unnoticed and unwritten. This glimpse of enslaved African actors at the royal court should jar historians to investigate an aspect of Iranian history that has been wholly overlooked.



Encountering Domestic Slavery: A Narrative from the Arabian Gulf

Rima Sabban

FIRST ENCOUNTERS WITH FORMER SLAVES

Hadiya

Early one morning during the hot, sweltering, forty degree summer of June 1993, while I was in the middle of data collection for my research on domestic workers in the United Arab Emirates, I walked up to a merchant household in well-to-do middle-class Emirati neighborhood. The neighborhood was very peaceful. The villas in the area were all rather stylish and distinguished by elegant and architectural high walls that enclosed each home for added privacy. It was late in the morning, the clock nearing ten when I approached the house. A domestic helper opened the door, and when I asked for the lady of the house, mentioning that I was their neighbor down the street, she guided me inside along an alley dividing the rooms where maids, cooks and drivers resided, from the main house where all other members of the family lived. She led me from the back door to the main house, which faced the traditional outdoor kitchen, and guided me to a room inside the house asking me to wait until the host arrived. Moments later, the warm and welcoming face of the lady of the house, a woman in her late forties, greeted me with friendly salutations.

R. Sabban (✉)
Zayed University, Dubai, UAE
e-mail: rima.sabban@zu.ac.ae

The woman guided me to what was, I discovered, the ladies' morning room where family and friends would gather. I was neither and my presence was an occurrence that was not very common in the closed Emirati society.

The ladies' morning gathering is a practice reminiscent of older times, when living in the close confines of traditional tents and clustered dwellings allowed women to come together after they had finished the day's work. I took my place in a living room full of women gathered in what appeared to be a coffee morning or "Qahwat al Dhuhā," as it was commonly known. The group consisted of more than half a dozen middle-aged Emirati women, sitting and enjoying their morning of talk. When I was introduced as their neighbor who was working on research, the momentary lull in conversation my initial presence created soon abated as the novelty of my interruption subsided and gave way to the more interesting pursuit of continuing earlier discussions which were mostly focused on their meetings, outings, dreams and few Islamic sayings, beliefs and interpretations from Sheikhs and so on. To my surprise, I appeared to be of little interest to those present with neither my work, my Emirati family nor my research attracting much in the way of curiosity. I felt like I had drifted into the background, in the midst of the gathering but not quite part of it. I tried not to disturb them and began to carefully observe the interactions as I waited patiently for the host to give me her undivided attention and answer my research questions. Until then, I listened carefully, and occasionally engaged in small talk myself. The whole scene, the setting, the hubbub of conversation was interesting for someone like me whose deep thirst to learn more Emirati culture was offset by both a professional desire for my research and, a more personal one, as I had recently adopted the society as my own through marriage. This women's (or more colloquially Hareem's) gathering turned out to be something of an eyed opener. I tried to absorb every detail of the women's conversations, their appearances and their gestures, the subtle changes to the tone of their voices, all of which bombarded my active senses with so much observational material. My inner sponge expanded toward every detail of their eyes, the texture of their skin, the embroidery on their long dresses or "Thobs" and even the quality of the breath they take in between their mildly heated discussion. However, a particular woman in the group [I will refer to her Hadiya, a common name used for female slaves, meaning a gift, since slaves were often presented as gifts between people] attracted my curiosity for different reasons. It was not her appearance, per se, so much as her behavior and demeanor that attracted my notice. Though she was dark skinned, and had comparatively African features, she didn't initially stand out from the rest of the group. What made me more interested in her were her behavior

and attitude, her body language and the manner of her conversation. Perhaps it was the general aura around her that felt different. Hadiya looked older than the others who were mostly in their late forties to mid-fifties. She easily looked to be in her sixties. She always confirmed what the lady of the house was saying. This was so different than the rest who acted sort of like themselves, and who expressed their own ideas and opinions. Hadiya was always confirming whatever the host said, with almost no exceptions. Hadiya's very presence started to feel like an extension of the lady of the house. Though Hadiya looked different from the rest of the group, she was clearly not a relative. Even her dress, though more colorful with very thin embroidery on the sides, seemed to be made of a thinner, cheaper fabric compared to the others who had more elaborate dresses and embroidery. Hadiya's pantaloons or "sirwal" commonly worn under the traditional dress was a sign of more traditional fashions unlike the other ladies who had longer more modern dresses that did not reveal their "sirwal," if they preferred to wear them. Hadiya also had a long black cotton sheila, of a style typically worn by elder women, and very different from the smaller silkier looking scarfs or "sheilas" others wore.

The lady of the house was distinguished by her very long, colorful cotton "sheila," usually worn for prayer, which is traditionally worn at home, and when receiving informal visitors.

My mind was taken by Hadiya completely. I wondered why despite her old age, it appeared she deferred in discussions rather than expressed her mind?

When I went back home and asked my in-laws about Hadiya's strange behavior, they said she must have been a former slave who had raised the lady of the house, or accompanied her as a child. This was not atypical behavior in a merchant family, such as the one I had just visited, as many merchants in the city did have slaves. My in-laws also explained to me how it was normal for former slaves to maintain a close relationship with the family that owned them. The former slaves, particularly in some merchant households, were still considered part of family gatherings because they were raised together and they were still alive, they still interacted.

The most fascinating part to me as an observer was the determination of these former slaves to continue to soothe their former owners' emotions and feelings. They seemed to have internalized their own enslavement, as though they were indebted to their former owners. They had to prove this loyalty for years, even decades, after they were freed. In the circumstances and environment in which I encountered Hadiya, it appeared to me as though her loyalty required no proof from those around her and yet it was clear she had internalized her enslavement as second nature, as a being who was molded to follow others.

Jumaa

My second encounter with a former slave was, once again, during that very same hot and humid summer of 1993. This time, however, events took place in an elite upper-class Emirati neighborhood. This neighborhood was not too far away from the middle-class one where I had met Hadiya. The neighborhood was recognizable as elite by the sheer volume of designated land surrounding each home which was much more substantial than those in typical middle-class neighborhoods. Land in such elite areas was usually provided to upper level government employees or Emirati's with close ties to the local Sheikhs and the ruling family.

It was around six in the afternoon and I was already inside the house conducting interviews for my research on domestic workers in the Emirates and had interviewed the lady of the house, who seemed a very gentle and humble woman. I had also asked to interview her domestic helper(s). She obliged and introduced me nicely to her domestic helpers, and I decided to sit and talk to the domestic worker from the Philippines (Catherine—not her real name). Catherine was in her twenties and was responsible for cleaning inside the house, mostly bedrooms and the upper parts of the large villa. Catherine would be equal to a “femme de Chamber” in the old French system. Catherine was fully at ease while I was interviewing her, and she was explaining her responsibilities and answering all my questions with extra details. She also told me how nice and sweet her female employer was with her, in contrast to the woman's husband who was apparently a womanizer and had attempted many times to sexually harass her. The helper would always tell the lady of the house of these incidents, and the woman always supported her and tried to teach her how to avoid him. The Filipina domestic helper had given me a good sense of the tension and regular humiliation her employer suffered from. In the middle of our conversation, the doorbell rang. A tall black man, handsome and aged close to fifty [we call him Jumaa for the purpose of this paper], entered the house with the familiarity of a regular member of the family. He was immediately welcomed by the humble lady of the house, who sat with him in the living room in a close proximity where they talked. I and the Filipina domestic were sitting on the higher level, yet we had a clear view of the two sitting and chatting intimately. It was obvious that the lady was unburdening her stress, and Jumaa was carefully listening and saying few words from time to time. Her proximity and intimacy with this old man Jumaa were clear signs in the Emirati society of a brother/sister relationship. The lady of the house looked much more relaxed speaking to him. I curiously asked Catherine if the man is related to the lady of the house. She said yes, he is like

a brother. This was a clear confirmation to me, that the lady of the house, who is also from a merchant descent as she had told me herself previously (during the interview), had grown with this man since her childhood. This practice was common in some merchant families, that children would have another child (slave) as a follower and companion. They played together, and the slave child would fulfill any requests by the child and accompany him or her. They usually carried out this practice as part of their name and existential reality. Many figures of former slaves were of good social standing and positions in the society today, carrying the name of their former owners: for example, Khamis Tabi' (or follower of) Mohamed. This man looked like someone who had grown up with this woman, and it was highly likely given the nature of their interaction that his mother had breastfed the lady of the house when she was a baby, thereby making him her milk brother (in Islam, if a person is breastfed by a woman, he or she becomes a brother or sister to all children of that woman and can't later marry any of her children).¹

INTRODUCTION

The stories above of both Jumaa and Hadiya are not unique cases. During my time in the UAE, I heard other stories of former slaves or their descendants who were married to many highly visible Emiratis in the society. Those who come from African origins are easier to identify in some cases by their darker appearance; however, some former slaves came from other areas, such as Baluchistan or parts of Asia, and their lighter-skinned appearance made them less distinguishable in society.

The stories of both Hadiya's and Jumaa's background are not unique among individuals who were manumitted after the abolition of slavery in the region. Slavery had existed in the UAE (known previously either as the Omani Coast or the Trucial States), as the country had been part of a slave trade route, and the culture of slavery was abundant in Oman and Buraimi² (as central slave market in the region) as demand went through ebbs and flows throughout history (Hopper 2015). Although slaves were taken mainly from Africa, there was a geographical variety in terms of slaves'

¹ This is the only condition of adoption accepted legally in Islam. A child can legally be adopted in a family, if the child is breastfed by a woman directly connected in blood to the family, i.e. when breastfed from the mother, or the direct aunty.

² Al Buraimi is a town at the border of Oman and UAE. During the British border designation, it was given to Oman, though even today many people living there consider themselves to be part of the UAE.

origins in the Arabian Gulf. In addition to slaves brought from across Africa, there were slaves from Baluchistan, Yemen, Sudan, Armenia and Georgia (Zdanowski 2013). There is a consensus in the literature about the difficulty of making accurate estimations of slave numbers in the Gulf; however, at the turn of the twentieth century, the African presence constituted a significant percentage of the total population of slaves in the Gulf, especially along the coasts (Hopper 2015; Zdanowski 2013; Sheriff 2005). Slaves were scattered along the Trucial Coast, and they could be seen on shores, on ships, on date palm farms, in homes, on streets and in the palaces of Sheikhs, and they occupied a myriad of positions ranging from menial to elite.

Nonetheless, there is a dearth of research on slavery in the Arabian Gulf, and particularly in the UAE. Some recent scholarly works have targeted slavery in the Gulf region, but such research is still very much in its infancy. When it comes to domestic slavery in particular, it is much less explored than other forms of slavery, and there is no scholarly work solely dedicated to domestic slavery alone, particularly within the UAE. The majority of work pertinent to domestic slavery comes as part of wider investigations into slavery in the region in general. My aim in this chapter is to shed light on domestic slavery, a long forgotten part of history within the Emirates, and to provide an analysis of the factors surrounding the silence on domestic slavery research in the Gulf in general and the UAE in particular.

CONTEXTUAL AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Definition of Slavery

Throughout human history, slavery has been a universal phenomenon that existed almost in every society since the dawn of time. Around the world, it played a fundamental role in the shaping of the economy, of politics and the administration of—and between—nations. According to Lovejoy, in its fundamental essence, slavery was “a means of denying outsiders the rights and privileges of a particular society so that they could be exploited for economic, political, and/or social purposes” (2000, 2). The “outsider” factor did not define the slave status in Islam. Slaves in Muslim societies were not slaves because they were outsiders, but because they were born having a slave status or enslaved under different circumstances. Slavery as defined by the Slavery Convention of the League of Nations

(1926) is “the status or conditions of a person over whom any or all of the powers attaching to the right of ownership are exercised” (Quoted in Turley 2000, 6). Normally, this ownership extended to include the slaves’ sexuality and reproductive capacities. Although ownership and exploitation characterize slavery in general, the dividing lines between the enslaved and the free varied from one society to another. In Islam, “slaves were chattels, similar to livestock in many respects, and yet they possessed certain carefully circumscribed rights, arising from their undeniable humanity” (Clarence-Smith 2006, 2). Marmon described the status of slaves in Islam as a “hybrid status” which allowed them to play various roles and cross the slave/free boundaries (Marmon 1999). This blurriness in slave/free boundaries engendered situations where slaves acted on “bewildering variety of social roles, from emirs to outcasts” (Marmon 1999, 2). In the same vein, commenting on slave categorization in the Ottoman Empire, Toledano replaced the dichotomy between slave and free with “a continuum of various degrees of bondage” (cited in Harms 2013, 12). Studies on slavery in the Indian Ocean context struggle to find a consensus on the meaning of slavery, especially when it is compared to the New World slavery (Campbell 2004 cited in Harms 2013, 12). While New World-style plantation slavery existed in some areas along the East African coast, the main form of slavery in the Indian Ocean context consisted of servile laborers who “ranged from plantation laborers and domestic servants to armed soldiers and palace concubines, all of whose status and circumstances varied considerably” (Harms 2013, 12). Harms (2013) argued that the relationship between master and slave is better understood as a form of patron-client relationship that made former slaves who gain their freedom lose their patronage. In some cases, the promotion of this patron-client relationship between masters and slaves was valued more than gaining complete freedom (Harms 2013).

The “Silencing” of the Subject

In the introduction of his book, *Islam and the Abolition of Slavery*, William Gervase Clarence-Smith (2006) described slavery as an “embarrassing institution” [this description has been borrowed from Patterson (1982)] that “often encourages silence” (p. 1). This silence can be noticed particularly in scholarship on slavery in the Middle Eastern context which “received only minimal attention from specialists in Middle Eastern social history” (Marmon 1999, 1). Such a void in the scholarly work in the

Middle East was also seen as a “remarkable dearth” (Lewis 1990, iv) which was more apparent in the topic of slavery in the Arabian Gulf context. Recently, some scholarly works have been published that attempted to shed some light on a long forgotten gap in this intellectual domain; nonetheless, the area of domestic slavery is the most silent of all.

In scholarship on slavery in the Middle East, the term “silence” has been used to describe both the limited research on slavery and the lack of authorial autonomy on the part of slaves to penetrate the silence. The silence of slave voices is not an exclusive aspect of Middle Eastern slavery—though throughout history, some slaves have documented their experiences in order to be heard—as Lengelle (1967) described the hushed slave voices as a historical silence of slaves. Many scholars have been intrigued by the desire to reconstruct voices of slaves in the Middle East history. However, such attempts can end up turning slaves into the object rather than the subject of the narrative [for further discussion, see Troutt Powell (2006) *Will that Subaltern Ever Speak?*]. The dilemma is that the majority of sources and documentations available to scholars in the Gulf were not recorded by slaves themselves. Most of the records and reports that describe slave life were written and kept by the Colonial British Authorities in the region, and these very one-sided records are used extensively in studying slavery in the Arabian Gulf. These sources, as Harms (2013) described them, “opened up a window into a previously hidden world” (p. 2). Harms’ description of such records as a window into a whole world is indeed true. These records represent only a small portion of the entirety of the slave population and experience in the Arabian Gulf. This silence in the history of slavery in the Arabian Gulf and particularly the UAE can be understood through three “silencing” aspects: the History, the Agency and the Accessibility:

The History. Scholarly work on slavery in the Arabian Gulf and particularly in the UAE is limited in both number and scope. Mention of slavery comes mostly from travelogues written by Western travelers who documented their observations on and interactions with people in the region (Wellested 1840; Ruder 1933; Thesiger 1959). Other sources come from British agencies and representatives [these sources were written during the Colonial British presence in the region, and they include archives such as the manumission documents and letters which the British representative would provide to slaves wishing for freedom]. Thus the discourse on slavery in UAE was penned mostly with foreign ink, British ink in

particular. This discourse, such as in manumission testimonies, might be flawed with errors of transcription, translation or errors due to negligence and misinterpretation of the part of the recorder (Hopper 2015). Furthermore, the silence of domestic slavery in particular goes back to the general opinion at the time of the British control in the Gulf that domestic slavery in Arabian Gulf was “comparatively harmless,” and consequently, “the British Government generally abstained from active interference with domestic slavery in the region” (Zdanowski 2013, 69–70). The narratives of the nineteenth-century Atlantic slavery have a lingering influence on Middle Eastern slavery research (Troutt Powell 2006). Local voices are not *totally* absent. In Saudi Arabia, one can find texts written by local sources (Al Tirmanini 1979). However, the UAE (formally known as the Trucial States) consisted of small communities, where hardship and lack of modern convenience and education were widespread. These conditions might have played a partial role in creating this silenced reality of domestic slavery.³

The Agency. The history of domestic slavery in the UAE is not only silent but also suffers from a lack of local scholarship to reconstruct it. Recently, some valuable works have been written on Arabian Gulf slavery, mostly by scholars foreign to the region (Hopper 2015; Bishara 2017). Local interest is almost non-existent. Furthermore, former slaves and their descendants have not filled the gap with their own histories and narratives. Most of the manumitted slaves were illiterate at that time. Moreover, they do not and did not have enough means and resources to embark on such a scholarly endeavor. Similarly, slave descendants in modern times are not interested in creating narratives of slavery in the region, although they are literate, educated and well-to-do.⁴ Slave descendants now have status in society, and any work of such a nature could potentially affect their status or their reputations. Moreover, the privileges provided by the UAE government to the citizens, such as housing, free education and other services, make them feel

³ As a colonial power in the region, England did not encourage any cultural development and schooling. As a result of harsh desert weather and general underdevelopment, the region was sparsely inhabited and lacking all aspects of services and modernity. Natives were mostly uneducated and incapable of recording their history given the focus on a harsh subsistence existence.

⁴ Unlike African descendants in Europe and Americas who narrate their stories and are proud of their ancestry and heritage.

a stronger sense of belonging to a government-nurtured sense of Gulf identity and Emirati identity.

The Accessibility: Part of collecting and creating domestic slavery narratives in the UAE entails gaining access to former slaves and to Emirati households with senior members who can reminisce and describe the slavery era. Such access is usually difficult to gain. Emirati households are closed to outsiders, and social privacy is a cherished value in the society. Thus it is extremely challenging for researchers and scholars to gather data directly from Emiratis or Emirati households, especially if the topic of research deals with their private lives.⁵

With such a lack of sources and documentation, absence of slave voices and the limited access to local households, reconstructing slaves' lives becomes a challenging endeavor. When faced with a similar dilemma in examining slavery in the Ottoman Empire, Toledano (2007) suggested using approaches that allow more flexibility and imagination to reconstruct slave narrations.⁶ In this chapter, I used interviews and data from oral narrators to reconstruct a small image of slave life and domestic slavery in the UAE during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

The Historical Background of Slavery in Gulf/UAE

Although there is a tendency to believe that slavery is a universal characteristic of Muslim societies that existed historically at all times, Hopper (2015) argued that slavery, in the Arabian Gulf at least, went through serious fluctuations depending on economic and political factors. As he explained, slave trade witnessed a huge increase in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries due to globalization and the consequent demands on products from the Gulf like dates and pearls. This unique economic boom leads to a dramatic growth in the African diaspora in the Gulf, where African slaves accounted for “nearly fifth of the eastern Arabia’s population by the turn of the twentieth century” (Hopper 2015, 22). Although

⁵ This became clear to me during the data collection phase when I tried to find and interview former slaves in the UAE because most of potential candidates refused and I reached many dead ends.

⁶ Oral history is seriously needed in this issue. It is still possible since elders with memories of such times are still around and could provide researches with much needed reliable indigenous information regarding these issues.

the majority of the slave population along the Trucial Coast were Africans, slaves varied in their ethnic and geographical backgrounds, since they were brought from different locations, including Africa, Europe and Asia. Slaves brought to Arabia were obtained through raiding villages, trickery or exchanging slaves for goods. Also it was not uncommon to kidnap slaves (or in some cases free people) when they wander alone and away from their areas.⁷

African slaves were brought mainly from Mozambique, Malawi and Zanzibar. Other slaves were brought from Baluchistan and Persian Makran (Zdanowski 2013). The nineteenth and early twentieth centuries' global demand on Gulf produce of dates and pearls caused a dramatic increase in slave numbers in the region. Male slaves were brought to work on pearl diving ships and on date palm fields. Most of the divers were brought as young boys and enlisted in other occupations, such as working in households and date palm fields, till they reach puberty when they became pearl divers (Hopper 2015).

Women slaves were desired goods too. They were mostly bought as concubines or domestic slaves. Slaves were given new names, and their former identities gradually eroded as they intertwined with the society

⁷ My sister in law, informed me that in the sixties, only a decade before the establishment of the UAE state they used to be afraid of walking too far, or past "Burj Nahar" a small tower like landmark in downtown Deira today. This was half an hour walk on foot from their house at the time. Raiders and kidnappers were everywhere at the edge of inhabitant areas looking for wandering people, children and individuals alike, walking along unprotected.

In a very interesting novel written by the son of King Abdul Aziz of Saudi Arabia, entitled "Kalb Min Bankalan" which translates literally to "A Heart from Bankalan" (Bankalan is an area in Makran/Baluchistan—today, it is partly in Pakistan and the other part in Iran). The novel is an oral history recounting his mother's story, a woman who was one of the King's concubines. Apparently, she came originally from a rich merchant family. Unfortunately, her parents died in an accident, and she found herself and the brother alone in an extended family whom they didn't like. So the two children decided to run away, and go to another relative close by. They were unlucky and caught and both sold to slavery. She was presented by the person who bought her as a gift to King Abdul Aziz, and the novel reports the details of her life as a concubine and later one of the wives of the King.

In addition, Thesiger, the British traveler and explorer, reported someone appealing to him to rescue "a Siyid" (a high-profile member of the society, a descendant from the prophet family) who was sold to a slave-dealer after he was kidnapped in the area close to Braimiy. He was from Hadramut, and was sold for only 230 rupees, a price that was ridiculously cheap for a slave. The traveler recalls this comparatively cheap price was related to the fact that they knew he will be released early. The average price at that time was 1000–1500 rupees. However, a good African slave was sold for 3000 rupees.

they lived in. They adopted Islam and were socially integrated in the society. Women slaves were given shiny and bright names such as *Sabah*, *Fairooz* and *Fadhaa*, which translate to Morning, Turquoise and Silver, respectively. Slave men were also given new names, such as *Mabrouk*, *Marzouk* and *Faraj*, which have connotations with prosperity and abundance. In modern times, some names are still recognized in the society as slave names (Al Sayegh 2005).

The Split Discourse over the Treatment of Slaves in the UAE

During the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century, the abolition of slave trade and slavery was the target of British policy in the Indian Ocean, a determination that entailed using both diplomacy and anti-slave trade patrols. As Harms (2013) argued, both of these strategies had little success in eliminating slavery or its trade in the region. The general view held by the British Government was that slavery as practiced in Arabia was “mild,” “gentle” or “benign” (Hopper 2015, 111). In addition to military slaves, Zdanowski (2013) noted that slaves in Trucial coast fell into two categories: industrial and household slaves. The latter category (i.e. household category—domestic slavery) includes slaves whose work entails direct contact with the members of the household, such as bodyguards and domestic slave servants. Household slaves were reportedly treated and clothed well and frequently their relationships with their masters were “attached by sentiment to the family in which they served” (p. 15). Their living conditions were generally considered favorable, and many of them sought to look after the patron-client relationship with their masters, since they were “assured their livelihood, in a region where nature made this difficult to obtain” (p. 15).

Wilfred Thesiger, one of the most prominent travelers in Arabia, reported that “[a]rabs have little if any sense of color-bar; socially they treat a slave, however black, as one of themselves” (1959, 71). He also noted that slaves in the Gulf region gain the status of their owner, “[s]laves belonging to men of importance are often overbearing and ill-mannered, trading on their master’s position” (Thesiger 1959, 71).

This perception of slavery in the region could be related to poor reporting, cultural bias and/or the overall image that it was comparatively better than other places in the world. History books written mostly by travelers report that the incidence of the mistreatment of slaves always existed hand in hand along the good treatment. Abdul Ghaffar Hussein, a UAE

merchant and intellectual known for his vivid history reading, reported many incidence of *Al-Zubna*, which means leaving one tribe for another (Al Hussein 2007). Slaves used to leave a tribe for another one because they were ill-treated. In the tribal system, seeking refuge offered protection for the person in question leaving the former tribe with no options regarding the defection. The UAE historians and intellectuals I spoke to about slavery were divided on the issue between those who saw it practiced similarly to other areas in the world and those who saw it completely differently as the region was closed off with social and living conditions in the UAE, meaning that slaves were more integrated in the society, though not always well treated (Al Sayegh 2005; Al Hussein 2007; Al Faris 2007; Al Mussalem 2006; Abdulrahman 2009).

It is also reported that Arabs trusted the slaves they raised according to Al Mussalem, resulting in a preference to buy slaves at very young age. During my discussions regarding the treatment of slaves in the Gulf or in other Muslim societies, Al Sayegh stated that slave owners took specific steps to integrate their slaves once purchased by firstly circumcising them if they were male, secondly changing their names (owners did not allow slaves to preserve his or her original name) and finally converting them to Islam. Al Sayegh also claimed most slaves had Muslim names that differed from main stream ones typically found in society such as “Khayrallah or Fadilallah” rather than Hassan, Mohammad or Salim. Al Sayegh also added that despite the fact that most slaves were converted into Islam, it was not uncommon for practicing slaves to be more fanatical about the teachings of Islam than other Muslims.⁸ In a reference to the Gulf region, Al Hussein⁹—who is very critical of treatment of slaves—said that in the Gulf region, it was so common to free slaves, mostly women, especially if she were to bear a child, indicating that even if the child died during childbirth, or if a freed woman was divorced from her husband in cases of marriage, the owner (former or current) would still be in charge of taking care of her and providing for her.

⁸ As a Muslim mother, who raised her children in the United States (Washington, D.C.), I came across similar practice by African American Muslims who acted more rigid Islamically than Muslims themselves.

⁹ Al Hussein, Abdul Ghaffar. Interview with Rima Sabban. Dubai, UAE. May 20, 2007.

METHODOLOGY

As mentioned earlier, this chapter stems from a particular moment which sparked my interest in slavery research in the UAE. Such research is embedded mostly in oral traditions and based on the direct interviews with Emirati historians, narrators and intellectuals. In an attempt to interview former slaves, I managed to gather only handful of accounts, most of whom didn't speak openly about their experiences. However, those few interactions sparked my own attempts at unraveling such a dormant area in the history of this region. It is thus important to report on these attempts as they not only explain the methodology of this chapter, but also shed light on the obscurity of this research area.

I conducted extended interviews with five local historians and public figures including: Dr. Fatima Al Sayegh,¹⁰ a former chair of the history department at the United Arab University in Al-Ain; Dr. Mohammad Al Faris,¹¹ a prolific historian known for documenting, translating and publishing documents from the British Archives related to the history of the UAE; Dr. Faleh Hanzal,¹² one of the early historians in the UAE, originally hailing from Iraq; Mr. Abdul Ghaffar Hussein, a renowned businessman famous for his great interest in writing about the history of the UAE; and Mr. Abdulla Abdul Rahman,¹³ an oral historian who conducted hundreds of interviews with elderly women and men for documentation and publication purposes.

After my first encounter with former slaves in the summer of 1993, I felt deeply driven by the desire to write about this forgotten reality in the history of the UAE. The topic of slavery has touched both my academic interest and a deeper personal interest that kept pushing me forward to investigate and research further. This academic/personal determination was kindled by the narrations of Emirati women in my social network about their accounts with slaves in their households (until the late sixties). These slaves were sort of their life companions as children. They were locally called *tabi'*, a term that means a follower.¹⁴ I then started locating

¹⁰ Al Sayegh, Fatima. Interview with Rima Sabban. Dubai, UAE. March 15, 2005.

¹¹ Al Faris, Mohamad. Interview with Rima Sabban. Sharjah, UAE. May 9, 2007.

¹² Hanzal, Faleh. Interview with Rima Sabban. Dubai, UAE. February 5, 2006.

¹³ Abdul Rahman, Abdulla. Interview with Rima Sabban. Dubai, UAE. January 5 and 6, 2009.

¹⁴ It was common in the UAE till the establishment of the federation in 1971 to say X is *tabi'* of Y. "Al-tabiya" or "dependency relationship" is a form of family extension. In such a

and reviewing existing literature on slavery in the Gulf in general and the UAE in particular. This stage revealed a remarkable dearth in the literature on slavery and domestic slavery more specifically in this region. Thus I decided to support my research at this stage in investing in my social capital. I contacted Mr. Abdulla Abdul Rahman who had interviewed many Emirati elderly people, with the hope that he could direct me to a former slave. This path, unfortunately, led to a dead end, since the two candidates who fit the purpose of this research passed away.

I turned then to *Bait Al-Mawrooth* [which translates to The Heritage House], a center dedicated to UAE history and cultural preservation in Sharjah. The center contained recorded tapes of the oral history of the UAE, which, after examination, proved to be irrelevant to my research topic, i.e. domestic slavery. The very few oral narrations addressed aspects of social life in a general way and focused on topics like economy at the time, living hardships and the pearl diving profession. The little information related to social life gave accounts of marriages, weddings and social obligations. Although the tape recordings appeared to lead to nowhere in relation to domestic slavery, the interview I conducted with the Director of *Bait Al-Mawrooth*, Mr. Abdul Aziz Mussalem,¹⁵ turned to be fruitful. Al Mussalem had also introduced me to an elderly person, recognized in this research as Al Rawi¹⁶ (a term meaning the storyteller in Arabic). Al Rawi was a man in his sixties who had retained a lot of information from the past and had a strong ability to report them eloquently. He is called upon in different TV and radio program (as he told me) to speak about the past in programs focusing on the heritage of the UAE. He was also interviewed by *Bait Al-Mawrooth* when they needed someone to talk about the past.

The continuous search that followed after led me to a female former slave who agreed to be interviewed. She was a senior woman in her early seventies. I came to know about her through an Emirati research assistant who used to live in the same neighborhood as the woman. My Emirati research assistant confirmed to me that the lady was a former slave, who had been manumitted before the establishment of the federation. I promised the research assistant not to discuss the slavery issue directly with the

relationship, the head of the family is responsible for his dependents. Even the manumitted slaves kept a form of connectivity to their previous owners as it gave them lots of social context and somehow status in a closed tribal society, where social status is paramount.

¹⁵ Al Mussalem, Abdul Aziz 2006. Interview with Rima Sabban. Sharjah, UAE. March 26, 2006.

¹⁶ Al Rawi. Interview with Rima Sabban. Sharjah, UAE. April 12, 2006.

woman, and to speak with her about the old days only. Thus, I was constantly careful not to address the topic of slavery directly in fear of causing her any disturbance or offense. However, I could not interview her again, because it was difficult to reach her at one point and then when I met her again, she had health challenges that did not allow her to be interviewed. Some of the information from the interview I conducted with her was used in this chapter, and she will be referred to as *Um Khammas*, a pseudonym taken from a locally produced cartoon show that revolves around social life in the UAE from the perspective of four elderly women. *Um Khammas*, the cartoon character, is portrayed as a dark-skinned elderly woman with traditional Emirati dress. Although it is not directly indicated, this character is subtly suggested to be a former slave especially that the name *Khammas* was a common name among slaves in the slavery era in the Gulf region [Names of male slaves also include: Mabrouk, Mubarak, Farhan, Marzuq, Bilal, Faraj, Khamis, Sarur, Juma'a, Haboush, Johar, Mesoud. Names of female slaves include: Hadiyah, Mubarak, Zahra, Hilaweh, Latifah, Zamzam].

It was extremely difficult to get in touch with another interviewee. Then I had the chance to conduct an interview with an adopted child from Africa, who was raised as an Emirati, studying in regular government schools, speaking the language and adopting the culture. This individual will be referred to as *Salem* in this chapter. Salem was in his late twenties; he didn't receive Emirati citizenship because his adopted brothers rejected him. According to his account, he was adopted when he was three, because his biological father feared for his life in Rwanda. Salem was born soon after the massacre in 1994, so the father brought him to an Emirati family. Salem showed positive attitude toward my research attempts and tried on many occasions to help me find interviewees from slavery background in the UAE, as he had many friends and acquaintance descendants of slaves in Dubai. But his efforts were fruitless, since those who he tried to talk into taking part in the research refused and resented the idea. The only luck I had was when I was in a welfare neighborhood¹⁷ driving and looking around, a particular house attracted my attention, it was nicely decorated with UAE cultural symbols of old life, such as artificial well and jars and particularly nice and well-maintained flower beds. While admiring the entrance of the house, I saw a black man in his late fifties going out to

¹⁷A welfare neighborhood is usually built by the government for lower income Emirati families.

water the flowers. I greeted him and asked if we could talk. Once inside, he told me that he was a descendant of a former slave, and we had a short interview.

The interviews I conducted focused mainly on obtaining information about the origins of slaves, their duties in the household and their relationships with the family members of those household. I paid particular attention to differences between the treatment of female and male slaves and their present status in Emirati society. This research was very challenging in terms of finding descendants of slaves interested in talking freely. The following will further explain the process and attempt to answer why there was such a refusal and resistance to talk about slavery and their ancestral past.

DISCUSSION

Domestic Slaves in the UAE

Slaves in the UAE were brought from different geographical locations. Africa and Baluchistan were the most common suppliers of slaves to Trucial States. However, some slaves in the region were considered without origins, and they were placed at the very bottom of the social hierarchy in the UAE. Al Mussalem, the Director of *Bait Al-Mawrooth*, recalled “slaves with no origin” who were looked down at by African slaves. They were called *Zutut* or *Ashash*, a local term that means someone of no significance. Al Mussalem further described their appearance as “white with curly hair,” and he speculated that they could be originally from Baluchistan.

Even though “domestic slavery” outlasted the abolition of slavery enforced by the British after the fall of the pearl diving trade, slavery including domestic slavery did take another local form and turn. In the Trucial States, Heard-Bey (1982) noted that “very few families could afford to have domestic slaves as opposed to locally available helpers for work in the date gardens” (p. 152). On the other hand, as she explained, the wealthy pearling entrepreneurs, locally called *Nukhadha*, not only owned ships for pearl diving purposes but also a number of slaves (mainly Africans) who used to help in operating the ships and diving for pearls.

As Al Mussalem reported in the interview, Obeid bin Issa Al-Naboda, a *Nukhadha*, used to have over one hundred slaves in his household (Al Mussalem 2006). He also added that Rashid Bin Ali—a wood merchant

from Sharjah—encountered four poor people from Africa whom he asked to accompany him on his journey back to Sharjah and help on the ship. The four Africans went to Sharjah with Bin Ali where they lived for four months, and they decided afterward to return to their home countries to bring back their wives and children. In Sharjah, these families occupied the courtyard of the house where the family of Bin Ali lived, where the number of inhabitants reached forty in number with the newly added slaves. Commenting on Bin Ali's life with the slaves, he added that Bin Ali used to dine with the male slaves and serve them food, where they all circle around one shared meal in local custom, male members of a family used to share meals and eat together from large communal platters using their hands, while the head of the household would serve portions of food to other members and visitors. Thesiger (1959) witnessed an Amir in Hizaj who seated a black slave belonging to the King next to him and “during dinner served him with his own hands” (p. 71). Later in his life, Bin Ali taught his slaves how to operate ships, and he trusted them with his ships and trade between Sharjah and Africa.

Female domestic slaves used to be added to the Harem (or the women's sphere) of the household, where they were expected to do chores and take orders from the female members of the family. Children of slaves usually became the playmates of the children of the family, and later on in their lives assumed the role of helpers and followers. A male slave, especially during the economic boom of pearl trade, expected his master to provide him with a wife, which usually happened when he reached the age of twenty-five (Hopper 2015). Thus it was not uncommon for masters to buy female slaves as wives for male slaves. As Hopper (2015) explained, arranged marriages were the common norm which functioned as a way of “placating valued slaves and producing offspring that could potentially work for the master or be sold for profit” (p. 126). As the interviewed former slave, *Um Khammas*, recalls, “Before, when a man needs a wife, *Amu*, the head of the family [the master] brings him one. They sit in the men's tent. Women make *Khabis* [traditional sweet made from starch, sugar, saffron, margarine, and other seasoning spices]. They all sit to eat, and this is it! No dances. No sounds.”

It was not uncommon for wealthy men in the region to buy slave women as concubines (Hopper 2015; Zdanowski 2013). As Marmon (1999) noted, the boundaries between slavery and freedom in the Middle East were blurry, and it was possible to manipulate and cross these boundaries under certain circumstances. For example, depending on her position

and level of intimacy with her master, a slave concubine could climb the social status ladder. As reported by Al Mussalem,

We renovated two houses in Sharjah that belonged to Khalid Bin Ibrahim (one of the merchants in the early 20th century in Sharja). The houses were next to each other. One of them was dedicated to the slave wife, while the other dedicated to the free one. Both of the houses had similar standards. He [Bin Ibrahim] used to love his slave wife more than his free wife. He gave her all the jewelries. He was a strong man to do such a thing. Usually it is not easy to socially accept marrying a slave. The children from such marriage become part of the family. The status of a female slave cannot trespass that of a free local woman, *Bint Al Balad*, because in the Emirati society, marrying into families whose origin is known and socially prestigious is encouraged, especially for the status of the offspring. It is a common saying in the Emirati culture to investigate family origins when marrying, through looking at the uncles [from the mother side] and the mother “*Idha bidak walad, dawir lu khal wa Oom*” is a common saying which translates to if you want children, look who are their mother-side uncles and mother.

Al Mussalem also recalls from his childhood the use of domestic slaves/servants in his household. According to his recollections, they were not called slaves, but *Khuddam* (sg. *Khadim* or *Khadima*). They used to live on the other side of their house, and they were manumitted slaves living on their own in tents and humble houses. Al Mussalem recalls his interactions with these manumitted slaves through the following:

I used to go to their houses and ask for girls to help in the house or to breast-feed. They used to be clustered in a poor neighborhood. One of them was called *Lalo*. She was about our age. We [children of the household] used to tease her and give her hard time. But she was a strong girl. When she got hold of one of us to beat him, we couldn't run from her hands. But she used to act motherly towards us, especially if beaten by an insect or an animal.

Further he remembers an area called “Nassiriya,” where houses looked like Igloos. They were nice and neat, but some “red flagged” meaning intimate relationships used to be practiced there.¹⁸

¹⁸ I also heard anecdotally about similar places in Dubai, also run with slaves as sex workers.

The Gender Factor in Domestic Slavery

From the analysis of the obtained data, duties of domestic slaves differ according to their gender. Women were usually integrated in the Harem (female domestic sphere). In big families, they tend to have a mix of male domestic slaves and females. They are divided in their living spaces on the basis of their gender.¹⁹ Male domestic slaves used to serve in the *Majlis*, as it was usually the part of the house dedicated to receiving male visitors by the head of the household or head of tribes. These slaves were close to their masters and followed them like bodyguards, or they made and served coffee in the *Majlis*. Also, male domestic slaves used to run errands and do chores when asked by the women of a household, especially outside activities. They used to be called *Mtareesh* (sg. *Mitrash*) or *Merassil* (sg. *Mersal*), which mean messengers. As Al Mussalem reported, male domestic slaves functioned as links between households, as they used to carry messages, exchange food and goods, announce events such as weddings, illness and death. Some of them also did gardening work, and took care of plantations, especially palm trees. In addition, *Al Sayegh* reported in the interview other types of workers mainly from Iran who were usually employed in palm plantations as well. Confirming this view, Al Mussalem said that, “to clean date trees, *tagleep* as the term is used for this practice says Al Mussalem, better to bring a Baluchistani” (Al Mussalem 2006). In her novel, *The Sand Fish*, Maha Gargash addresses the intricacies of the different male and female slave roles in a merchant family. Though described as a young girl, the female slave in the household was responsible of the house chores fully, from the kitchen to the whole house. She also would go out if the women in the house would need anything. In the kitchen she helped with cooking, but was not in charge of it. Gargash describes clearly the gender division in the household, and where slaves were and were not allowed. She also hints to the variety of power lines a slave can or cannot cross, and their ability to gain status according to their understanding and personality (Gargash 2009). In her outstanding book on the origins and establishment of the UAE, Frauke Heard-Bey, also noted that male slaves in farming households

¹⁹ Only in case they are married (a male slave is married to a female slave and living in the same family) are they allowed to share a space of intimacy, particularly as such relationship is beneficial to their master, as it reproduces children and expands the property line of the master.

were expected to work in the farming of dates in addition to household chores when needed" (Heard-Bey 1982, 224–25).²⁰

Male domestics were also responsible for the following chores in the house: cleaning the front yard "*kaniss*" with a special broom made mostly from palm leaves and also the outside yard and livestock area. They milked the cows and prepared "*yogot*" a special dried yogurt made out of goat milk. They collected eggs for breakfast and fuel for the cooking fire walking up to 5 or 7 km to get the wood. Such duties were also done by women domestics. The female head of the house "mama o'd" used to cook. Domestics would help her in cleaning the fish and meat and cutting the vegetables. Usually the cooking was done by women of the house or under their supervision. The woman of the house monitored how they made food and baked bread. Even when households had a dedicated cook (slave or not), it was for the woman of the house to decide what to cook, and what to do with the leftovers. Female heads of the house follow up and make sure everyone completed their daily prayers. The female head in the house is the one in real charge. The male head of the house usually counts on her after God "Al-itimad ala allah wa ala sahibat al-bait" (Al Rawi 2006).

Sharing food and cooking as a regular practice, or on occasions such as weddings, funerals, circumcisions, among other many occasions, is a practice in the UAE society that still survives in a lesser form modern times. Such practice reaches its peak in Ramadan, where before "Iftar" or breakfast, one sees domestics carrying food from house to house in the neighborhood. Such practice requires much preparation and cooking, especially in Ramadan where wealthy families provide for everyone who comes across them. They also send food to mosques to feed the poor. All such cooking was, and still is, sustained by domestics in the household. Some of the food cooked then and now in such celebration: *Haris* (a meat and whole-wheat style porridge), *Khamir* (thick bread that somewhat resembles a pita), *Shabab* (another form of bread), *qors mehalala* and *riqaaq* (a thin crepe-like bread served with both sweet and savory toppings) and all are different forms of food and sweet based on flour and starch (Al Rawi 2006).

²⁰The farming of dates was also done by a group of people historically known as "mawali" or (subservient). They were called "Bayadir." "The term 'bayadir' (sing. Bidar) was widely used in the village communities of the Trucial States to identify farm workers. They were people who might be the descendants of the Persian village" (Heard-Bey 1982: 224)

In the old days, women usually gathered, especially in tribal settings, many times during the course of the day. They shared food, drinks and lots of coffee, or *Qahwa* taking pride in their particular specialties. Or they came together to help each other, especially if anyone in the neighborhood was in need. Most elderly women I interviewed did praise such practices which they missed today. In a nostalgic and yearning sentiments towards the “good old days” where they shared means “in early days we didn’t feel differences between rich and poor, we use to eat alike, dress alike” (Um Khammas).

*Former Slaves and Their Descendants in Current Times:
Relationships with Local Society*

Domestic slaves are considered “Rabai’b” (sing. Rabi’b), a term that describes slaves as part of the family, headed by the male head of the household or “arbab” in the local terminology. “Rab-usra” is the official term to describe a family tree which is always headed by the male, a structure derived from the tribal structure. In that sense, “Rabai’b” are the dependents, whom the head of the family is responsible for, to feed, clothe and at times share penalties or charges for their misdeeds. The bonding was strong and carried on for two to three generations remaining connected because the benefits this entailed.

Al Mussalem brings a verse of poetry from a local poet named Rabi’ bin Yaqot, expressing such a strong bonding between them:

أنا لا أعيش بدون ولانك عني والعبد ما يخلأ بلا عم

Which translates to “I can’t live without your enslavement- as the slave can’t be without his master” (the term used is uncle).²¹

²¹ Rabi Bin Yaqot is a poet who composes a type of popular poetry called “Al Shi’ir Al Nabatti.” He was born in 1928 and was celebrated for his life achievement and poetry by the Ministry of Culture in 2009. His work was published in a volume titled “Hassad Al O’mur” as a Collection of Work. He passed away in 2010. His name reflects a descendant of slave (as Yaqot is a slave name). <http://www.alittihad.ae/details.php?id=22049&cy=2009>

A domestic slave is considered a member of the family to the point where the lady of the house would consider a male domestic slave as a son, so does not cover in front of him, as she does when she meets other males in the society, or when she goes out.²² Both Al Mussalem and Al Sayegh speak of the general love known for slave companions of Sheikhs or members of the ruling families. "The love for blacks is still common until today among the ruling Sheikhs" said Al Sayegh (2005). "People use to say: who stands by the Sheikh is the slave and who is the first to betray is the Bedouin" (Al Mussalem 2006). It was also believed that male domestic slaves are more trustworthy than women as Al Rawi recalled.

Recalling an incident which happened between his mother and a domestic slave named "Asira," Al Mussalem says: "She was a slave of the Hamoor family. After her manumission, she used to come to my mother and ask for things. My mother gives her. In our culture you should not reject any request from a previously slave. Once we came home we didn't find the air conditioner. When asked my mother said 'Asira took it'. She has two sons. One of them is a known thief in Sharjah. But if he comes to me and asks for money, I have to give to him. He goes on saying, former slaves do not usually request a lot, so they can get it. We used to have a saying, Al Mussalem says: 'Idhan buz al a'bd wala ta'shi' which translates to 'make the slave feel good instead of giving him food.'"

The UAE takes pride that along the establishment of the federation, the ruler then, the late Sheikh Zayed bin Nahyan, requested that all former slaves be considered equal citizens. He demanded former owners to treat them as they would their own offspring and give them their names and affiliated positions. This is in contrast to the position of some of the UAE's neighboring states, such as Saudi Arabia, which was not happy with such a decision (Al Rawi 2006; Hanzal 2006).

When the UAE was established as an independent state, citizenship laws were varied along many levels. There was the top level: full citizens who have all the benefits of the welfare state, such as subsidized mortgages on housing, free schooling, medical treatment at home and abroad, land-ownership, university scholarships internally and abroad among many other benefits which were provided by the state at such time. The UAE oil

²² This could also be explained as lower level members in the society are considered as sub-categories, so they are not to be feared in a way. A similar practice I observed in the mid-1980s at the UAE University in the female dorms, as female students would go out not fully covered when gardeners are working outside.

rentier state of the seventies provided services (health, housing, education) to all, among them expatriates. However, provisions were provided according to a scale defined firstly by the type of citizenship/nationality and, secondly, proximity to the ruler and the ruler's entourage. Former slaves (domestic slaves among others) benefited equally like other citizens of the UAE. The former slaves were considered as equals. Those who were close to the rulers and the top elites of the society did benefit more than others.

It is very common today to see descendants of slaves in top government positions. The UAE is opening up even further with the changes brought about by globalization, and race and gender discrimination is declining. As such former slaves are treated as equal citizens. The UAE avoided open racial tension such as in the United States.

However, when one looks deeper into the socioeconomic fabric of the UAE society, the tendency is to find more people of color in welfare status (state welfare neighborhoods) than in well-off neighborhoods. This is not to dismiss the existence of some slave descendants in the highly well-off statuses. The UAE in this case is like all other societies which open up to equal rights. It takes a long time for the total equal balance to take place. When I discussed this observation with Salem, the African gentleman adopted by a UAE family, he divided the responsibility between the government and the former slaves. He said: first the local social policies which encouraged the dependency mentality in the less off members of the society, among them those from African origins. Second, he said: they are also to blame for their passive attitude. They need a more proactive attitude and engagement with the society. They played by the "miskin" (victim) mentality, the ones who always find it easier to ask than to work on building the self.²³

²³ In the UAE at large, women seem to be doing better than men in general. The same applies to former slaves, or women with dark color, who I have seen during my life in the UAE for the last thirty-three years, among them those I knew for sure are descendants of slaves. I have seen them in universities, in the work place, in the market and also in the welfare neighborhoods; my personal observation could tell a much brighter story of the females I have encountered in most of these spheres. Such observations could be explained by other reasons that are beyond the scope of this paper to address, and relates to combined cultural and state policies factors.

CONCLUSION

This chapter aimed to shed light on a dark and unexplored area in the history of the UAE: domestic slavery. Despite all the efforts made in this exploration, the central issue remains as the deafening silence of domestic slavery in historical accounts and academia. As discussed earlier, there are multiple factors that contributed and still contribute to the silence surrounding the issue of domestic slavery in the UAE. The lack of documentation and sources, the absence of slave authorial autonomy, limited access to former slaves, and little local and academic interest in the subject are among the top contenders for such silence. During the work on this chapter, my personal observation was that there is a social desire to keep this topic buried in the past. While working on this topic, the multiple social and cultural aspects of this silence brought on a personal sense of guilt for touching upon such a sensitive subject. I wished to come across a student (descendant of slave) who was similarly interested in exploring this issue so I could dig deeper along with her. If it had not been for my personal “not a quitter” attitude, and the multiple discussions of this important topic with colleagues, this chapter would have not seen the light of day. The silence that enveloped domestic slavery in the UAE for a long time left me with many unanswered questions, such as: why is domestic slavery as a topic so silent? Why do former slaves and their descendent refuse to discuss this matter? Why many—including some academics—think of slavery as a trivial or unworthy topic? Why does it appear to be absent in the social imagination of the society? Each of the above questions necessitates further independent investigation that will hopefully be able to shatter the heavy silence surrounding slavery in the region.

Domestic slavery, as the chapter has clearly established, is a vital topic and a sociohistorical moment that deserves to be understood. It was a phenomenon which shaped lives and families at a critical moment in the history of the UAE. My investigation and social capital in this closed society has so far helped me come up with few explanations for such silence as follows:

- On the level of total absence in the social consciousness, I think patriarchy silenced domestic slavery compared to slavery that participated in public life, especially in terms of its economic and political aspects. Domestic slavery did sound marginal, unimportant and almost non-existent for those who only admitted one type of slavery

(the one linked to pearl diving) and saw domestic slavery thus as not worthy studying because it did not exist separately.

- Male-dominated academia participated in the silencing of domestic slavery. One of the historians (Faleh Hanzal 2006) has openly asked me to search for another topic than domestic slavery, as it was non-existent in the UAE.
- Lack of addressing the topic from oral tradition fields. If the national project established by “Bait Al-Mawrooth” does document domestic slavery, at least when they did interview former domestic slaves, or if oral historians like the one I interviewed did address the topic, the issue then would not have been as silent to the point of total non-existence. Failing to address it could be understood by the lack of awareness to such issues (a patriarchal culture), and the reluctance to address socially sensitive issues such as slavery.

As for the descendent of slaves who were educated UAE men and women, whom in theory one could assume would welcome a project which narrates part of their history. But their resistance to opening such history could be explained differently:

- One explanation was presented by the only descendent of a former slave family who I did interview, Salem (not his real name). He said: “today people are living differently than before. They feel embarrassed speaking about it. How come they did accept such a thing? Slavery... You know (he pauses)... put yourself in their situation... it is not easy to say... this is my history... there is an element of degrading in it... people now feel they did rise and are making a status for themselves.”
- In UAE today, being a National citizen is a status in itself, especially in a society that is ethnically stratified, where nationals represent an upper class. So for a former slave, who is now part of the elite upper class, would not want to address such history today. A sense of pride in the way former slaves were integrated and fully accepted as full and equal citizens is at the base of such need to silence the past.
- Another explanation could be embedded in the general tribal culture. UAE is a culture of privacy and protection. Contrary to the west where total transparency is a sign of healthy dealing, sensitive issues, in the UAE in general, are better resolved when dealt with on the private, not the public. Therefore, speaking up, in the understanding

of descendent of slaves, could be considered like criticizing rulers or previously masters. Since they all feel they were treated better than elsewhere, even all other Gulf States, they might see no need to speak up in public. Bringing the topic to public could be misrepresented, misunderstood or mistreated.

Having come to such observation, the questions to follow would then be: Will this topic be ever discussed by its own agency? Will it be addressed by others? Or will it be silenced forever?

It is not easy to answer such questions. However, I think with the advancement of education, I would expect the topic to raise the interest of one of the descendent, most probably a female. Being addressed by others would in itself again raise the issue of methods. Accessibility is not easy, especially for a topic which the agencies would like to keep it silenced, at least for the moment. Future students have to seriously think of indirect ways of approaching it especially if they opt to oral history. Needless to say, the very fact of addressing it in this paper could have the “Pandora box” impact, or most probably a seeding effect. I personally think university teachers and academics have the most important role on this level to trigger the interest of local students in such issues. Faculties could ask students to orally report the UAE history and therefore break the many layers of silence ... silence ... silence ...

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“Tyran[n]ical Masters Are the Turks”: The Comparative Context of Barbary Slavery

Christine E. Sears

In 1785, Barbary corsairs commandeered the Boston schooner *Maria* and her six-man crew as the vessel neared the Portuguese coast. The Algerian corsairs hauled Captain Isaac Stephens and his crew into Algiers, where the men languished for 11 years. Most seamen quarried stone, maintained the harbor’s mole or breakwater, or toiled in other ways in Algiers. Stephens, other captains, and mates paid a monthly fee for the privilege of doing no or little labor, while others, like Stephens’s crewman James Cathcart, served in the Algerian bureaucracy. Five of the six men were be redeemed by 1796; the sixth died in Algiers.

How can we understand and describe the Algerian experience of Stephens and his crew? Stephens’s contemporaries and current scholars are divided, variously applying the labels slaves, prisoners of war, or captives, sometimes

James L. Cathcart, “Diplomatic Journal and Letter Book of James Leander Cathcart, 1788–1796,” *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* 64 no. 2 (October 1955), 315.

C. E. Sears (✉)

University of Alabama in Huntsville, Huntsville, AL, USA

e-mail: cs0003@uah.edu

using the categories interchangeably.¹ Like Stephens and his countrymen, we lack an all-encompassing definition of slavery to guide how we define his Barbary confinement. Orlando Patterson aimed to craft a universal definition of slavery in his epic *Slavery and Social Death*. Patterson saw slavery as not simply a matter of property but of social context. Slavery was, he argued, the state of being socially dead, dishonored, and dominated. Scholars found Patterson's work stimulating and insightful but agree that it "failed to produce a theory" that explained "all slavery at all times." In fact, as one scholar observed, Patterson "unintentionally demonstrated" the impossibility of this endeavor.²

Stephens's Barbary years differed from New World and antebellum US slaveries. Neither Stephens nor most other Barbary bondsmen endured a lifelong, hereditary, or racial enslavement organized around cash crop production. But the fact that Stephens's Barbary years did not resemble these two specific forms of slavery—New World or nineteenth-century United States—does not mean Stephens was not a slave. He and others in Barbary endured a different form of slavery, not chattel bondage associated with the New World. Stephens and others in Algiers withstood ransom slavery, an often temporary bondage that included elite and non-agricultural labor. If or when ransom was paid, the slave was released from bondage. If redemption was not forthcoming, the bondsmen remained enslaved perhaps until death.

Though it bore close kinship with Mediterranean and Ottoman systems of bondage, Barbary slavery has been "quarantined and divorced from the wider experience of slavery across the region."³ In Barbary, as around the Mediterranean and Ottoman Empire, bondsmen were enslaved through warfare and raiding; some occupied elite or administrative positions; and many had a comparatively high access to manumission. Fortunately, several

¹ See Daniel Hershenzon, "The Political Economy of Ransom in the Early Modern Mediterranean," *Past and Present*, no. 231 (May 2016), fn. 2, 62. For a more in depth discussion, see Christine E. Sears, *American Slaves and African Masters: Algiers and the Western Sahara, 1776–1820* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2012), 18–20.

² Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death* (Harvard University Press, 1982); Paul Finkelman, Review of Patterson, *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 15, no. 3 (Winter, 1985), 508. Rio notes that Patterson's is the closest as close to a general definition as we have, and the definition has seeped into slave studies. Alice Rio, "Freedom and Unfreedom in Early Medieval Francia: The Evidence of Legal Formulae," *Past & Present* 193 (Nov., 2006), 11–12.

³ Stephanie Cronin, "Islam, Slavery, Agency, and Abolitionism in Iran, the Middle East, and North Africa," *Middle Eastern Studies* 52, no. 6 (2016), 966.

Barbary slaves left copious papers that can be consulted, in addition to consular and government records and correspondence. Examining Stephens's Algerian bondage with a comparative eye discloses how this ransom slavery related to Mediterranean, Ottoman, and other slaveries. Further, this investigation demonstrates that older forms of servitude, like ransom slavery, persisted alongside New World plantation slavery. To discover how Barbary ransom slavery functioned, we must first discuss—and dismiss—the outsized presence of Antebellum US slavery. Then, we can assess Barbary slavery within its context, particularly in terms of methods of enslavement, labor and elite status, and the opportunity to be ransomed.

Barbary States' enslavement of Europeans and Americans, or “Christian slaves,” as Algerians referred to them, differed from New World or antebellum US slavery. The differences may seem stark. During Stephens's Algerian years, four of his sailors performed daily manual labor and were confined nightly in a *bagnio*, or prison, with other Christian slaves.⁴ Meanwhile, Captain Stephens and his first mate Andrew Forsythe worked little and resided with European consuls, outside of the *bagnios*. One crewman, James Cathcart, became an elite or administrative slave who amassed both influence and property while enslaved. All could send and receive correspondence and newspapers; they might acquire money in several ways; and, if they had money, they could patronize local markets and *bagnio* taverns. One of the six crewmen died in Algiers, but five were ransomed. One crewmember was redeemed in 1793, the other four in 1796 when the United States concluded a treaty with Algiers.⁵

These characteristics—access to funds and outside contacts, elite status, little labor, and the possibly temporary nature—led some to conclude that Algerian Christian bondage was not “real” slavery. The problem of defining their status dates from at least the 1780s when North Africans seized

⁴ *Bagnio* is Italian for bath, but related to *banyol*, the Turkish for a royal prison. Stephanie Nadalo, “Negotiating Slavery in a Tolerant Frontier: Livorno's Turkish Bagno (1547–1747),” *Mediaevalia* 32 (2011), 278; “Philadelphia, March 1” Letter from William Penrose, *Hampshire Chronicle*, 3-18-1794 Vol. 11, no. 12, 2; Richard B. Parker, *Uncle Sam in Barbary: A Diplomatic History* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2004), 11. For more on comparative perspective, see Gillian Weiss, *Captives and Corsairs: France and Slavery in the Early Modern Mediterranean* (Stanford University Press, 2011), 4–5, and Sears, *American Slaves, African Masters: Algiers and the Western Sahara, 1776–1820* (Palgrave, 2012), 4, 18–20.

⁵ Harnet, or Harmet, died. George Smith was redeemed early. Sears, *American Slaves*, 98–101.

Americans, and when, not coincidentally, the American chattel slave system was changing, becoming more entrenched in the US South. Men detained in Algiers designated themselves slaves. Captain Stephens decried his “mortifying State of Slavery” in a desperate letter to John Adams. Two years later, he styled himself “Isaac Stephens Slave.” Another victim, Richard O’Brien, explicitly rejected the phrase prisoner of war. They were, he insisted, “slaves.” Of course, both men chose evocative language in hopes of moving their liberty-loving countrymen to extricate them from Algiers. In this sense, they likely did not care what their status was called, as long as they were released. Indeed, they sometimes switched the terms. In a 1792 petition to Congress, O’Brien requested that they as “prisoners at Algiers” be “Redeemed from Captivity.”⁶

Stephens’s contemporaries employed “slave” and “captive” in relation to those in Barbary with little consistency or precision. Robert Montgomery, the US consul in Alicante, reported the 1787 plague deaths of “Christian slaves” in Algiers. Thomas Jefferson submitted a 1790 report on the “American Captives” in Algiers, wherein he shared his fears that these “Captives might be sold” into the “interior and distant Countries of Africa.” A few lines down in the same 1790 report, Jefferson pointed out that the Algerian “Slaves were become scarce.” In 1815, diplomat William Shaler declared it “preposterous” that Algerians enslaved those they seized. Their condition, claimed Shaler, rivaled the horror of the African slave trade. By 1826, Shaler had changed his mind. Now, he deemed Stephens, Cathcart, and others well treated, if long detained, prisoners of war.⁷

Stephens’s captor offered yet another perspective on Mediterranean slavery, though one relayed through crewman Cathcart’s eyes. The Captain,

⁶ Captain Isaac Stephens to John Adams, Dec. 1785, *Founders Online*, National Archives; Stephens to Adams, 24 October 1787, *Founders Online*, National Archives; Richard O’Brien, Zacharus Coffin, Isaac Stephens, Andrew Montgomery, and Alexander Forsythe to John Adams, 13 Feb. 1787, *Founders Online*, National Archives; Petition to the US Senate, Richard O’Brien, Isaac Stephens, Andrew Montgomery, James Cathcart, George Smith, Philip Sloan, Peter Lorin, Gregory Billings, Jacobens I. Panier, William Patterson, James Garnet (probably Harnet), and James Hull to John Adams, 12 May 1792, *Founders Online*, National Archives.

⁷ To Thomas Jefferson from Robert Montgomery, 25 August 1787, *Founders Online* IV. Report on American Captives in Algiers, 28 December 1790, *Founders Online*, National Archives; William Shaler to Jonathan Russell, US Consul to Stockholm, Algiers, 26 Sept. 1815, Folder Correspondence 1815–1818, Shaler Family Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA; William Shaler, *Sketches of Algiers, Political, Historical, and Civil* (Boston, Cummings, Hilliard, and Co., 1826), 76; Sears, *American Slaves*, 17.

or *Rais*, “a venerable old Arab,” had, he announced “been a slave [him] self.” Twice. First he was detained in Spain, and later in Genoa. Both times, he was redeemed and returned to Algiers. Other sources corroborate this man’s experience of cross-Mediterranean bondage and redemption, a cycle of freedom and ransom slavery. The Algerian *Rais* schooled Stephens and his crew on their status in Algiers. Like him, the *Rais* assured the *Maria*’s crew, they could be redeemed and restored to liberty. They learned that their enslavement might be a temporary, not a permanent state.⁸

For the *Rais* as for early modern Europeans and those in the Mediterranean world, Stephens’s 11 years in Algiers was a familiar, perhaps all too familiar, type of slavery. Thousands of Britons and perhaps millions of Europeans were enslaved in the Barbary States over the early modern period. Europeans also captured and enslaved North Africans. Countless Britons and Europeans chose to reside in North Africa, where they interacted with the enslaved. Those who remained in Europe encountered Christians enslaved in Barbary through literature, plays, slaves’ memoirs, and from those who travelled to or had business connections with North Africa. Even in New Spain, residents were urged to contribute alms that would be used to ransom their enslaved compatriots from North Africa.⁹ Europeans knew the path from freedom to unfreedom and back again was slippery, uncertain, even reversible. Like the *Rais* who enslaved Stephens, they might be free one moment, enslaved the next, and gain their freedom again.

Europeans and Americans inhabited a world in which a variety of slaveries simultaneously operated. Ottoman military and elite slaves fascinated early modern Englishmen, and then Americans. They were aware of

⁸ James Cathcart, *Account of Captivity*, Papers of James Cathcart, 1785–1817, Library of Congress, Manuscript Reading Room, Washington D.C., 8; Sears, *American Slaves*, 10–11; Daniel Hershenzon, “[P]ara Que Me Saque Cabesa Por Cabesa...”: Exchanging Muslim and Christian Slaves across the Western Mediterranean,” *African Economic History* 42 (2014): 11–36; Eyal Ginio, “Piracy and Redemption in the Aegean Sea During the First Half of the Eighteenth Century,” *Turcica* 33 (2001): 135–147; Linda Colley, *Captives: Britain, Empire, and the World, 1600–1850* (Anchor Books, 2002), 46.

⁹ Colley, 43–45; Karen Melvin, “Charity Without Borders: Alms-Giving in New Spain for Captives in North Africa,” *Colonial Latin American Review* 18, no. 1 (April 2009): 75–97. See also Nabil Matar, *Turks, Moors, and Englishmen in the Age of Discovery* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999) and Robert C. Davis, *Christian Slaves, Muslim Masters* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2003). For more on Muslim and Christian interactions in the Mediterranean, see Molly Greene, *Catholic Pirates and Greek Merchants: A Maritime History of the Mediterranean* (Princeton University Press, 2010).

plantation slavery as it existed on Madeira Island, and later, the Atlantic sugar islands. In the 1780s and 1790s, they tracked changes in US slavery, as the institution shifted south and west around cotton cultivation. Europeans and Americans observed and interacted with various slaveries in the Middle East, Mediterranean, North Africa, and New World. Given the divergence of slaveries known, it is not surprising that “Englishmen imagined slavery in exceedingly loose terms” or that their “conception of slavery” was “wide ranging and often incoherent.”¹⁰

If we are to recapture what slavery was in the Barbary State of Algiers, we must first banish the pervasive specter of nineteenth-century US bondage. Antebellum US slavery was an outlier in world history, yet the institution commandeers public, and even professional, perceptions about slavery. In fact, plantation slavery was not the dominate form of bondage seen in world slaveries. The New World plantation model marked a “radically different form of social organization and commercial production” than what preceded it.¹¹

Other slaveries predominate in world history. World history contains countless examples of slaveries that were not racial, not necessarily permanent, and offered elite status. Barbary corsairs and their European counterparts practiced ransom slavery from at least the sixteenth century. War captives were enslaved in the medieval period, especially in the contest for the Iberian Peninsula. Roman, Mesopotamian, and other ancient slave systems worked in similar ways. Yet the pervasiveness, even invasiveness, of Antebellum US slavery as the norm means that scholars exploring other slave systems must first confront, and then dismiss, its specter before delving into slaveries in other times and places.

¹⁰ Adam R. Beach, “Global Slavery, Old World Bondage, and Aphra Behn’s *Abdelazer*,” *Eighteenth Century* 53, no. 4 (Winter 2012), 413–415; Michael Guasco, *Slaves and Englishmen* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014), 9, 51–52.

¹¹ Ira Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone* (Harvard University Press, 1998), 96; Simon P. Newman, *A New World of Labor: The Development of Plantation Slavery in the British Atlantic* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 1–2. See also Robin Blackburn, *The Making of New World Slavery* (New York: Verso, 1997). For more on comparative slavery, see Stanley L. Engerman, “Slavery at Different Times and Places,” *American Historical Review* 105, no. 2 (April 2000): 480–484; David Brion Davis, “Looking at Slavery from Broader Perspectives,” *American Historical Review*, 105, no. 2 (2000), 457–458; Peter Kolchin, “Some Recent Works on Slavery Outside the United States: An American Perspective,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 28, no. 4 (Oct. 1986), 772, and Juliana Barr, “From Captives to Slaves: Commodifying Indian Women in the Borderlands,” *Journal of American History* 92, no. 1 (Jun. 2005): 19–46.

Scholars of slavery generally concur that slavery depends on context, that the institution can only be understood within the time and place it existed. Acknowledging this leaves space for the “possibility that” slavery “meant something different in other societies in other times.” Periodically, scholars of slavery in Africa, the Mediterranean, or other regions hopefully assert that “recent studies have toppled a seemingly unitary definition of slavery from its position” and replaced it with “far richer understandings of slavery as a term with many, varied meanings.” Yet the US South’s “peculiar institution” remains entrenched as “slavery” writ large.¹²

A quick look over the diverse ways slavery was identified and operated will reveal the wisdom of investigating slaveries in situ. In some areas, slavery served an economic function; in others, a social role; in still others, political. Or, in some cases, all three at once. Slavery has been identified by the labor bondspeople did, their legal status, or the violence or coercion they faced. Antebellum US slaves are frequently demarcated chattel slaves, or legally property, subject to an often violently coercive system organized to extract labor. Slavery has functioned as a way to absorb outsiders into a kin group, which occurred while extracting labor and exerting control over the enslaved. Because the enslaved were found in all sectors, many slaveries cannot be described by the work performed by the enslaved.¹³

¹²Gwyn Campbell and Edward A. Alpers, “Introduction: Slavery, Forced Labour, and Resistance in Indian Ocean Africa and Asia,” *Slavery and Abolition* 25, no. 2 (August 2004), x; Juliane Schiel, Stefan Hanß, “Semantics, Practices, and transcultural Perspectives on Mediterranean Slavery,” Hanß and Schiel (eds.), *Mediterranean Slavery Revisited (500–1800)* (Zurich: Chronos, 2014), 15; Ehud R. Toledano, “The Concept of Slavery in Ottoman and Other Muslim Societies: Dichotomy or Continuum?,” in Miura Toru and John Edward Philips (eds.) *Slave Elites in the Middle East and Africa: A Comparative Study* (London: Kegan Paul International, 2000), 163; Christoph Witzernath, “Slavery in Medieval and Early Modern Eurasia: An Overview of the Russian and Ottoman Empires and Central Asia,” in Christoph Witzernath *Eurasian Slavery, Ransom, and Abolition in World History, 1200–1860* (Ashgate, 2015), 1–3, 5; Daniel Pipes, *Slave Soldiers and Islam* (Yale University Press, 1981), 17–18.

¹³Sean Stilwell, *Slavery and Slaving in African History* (Cambridge University Press, 2014), 5; V.P. Franklin, Review of Patterson, *The Journal of Negro History*, 68, no. 2 (Spring, 1983): 212–216; Michael Craton, Review of Patterson, *The Journal of American History*, 70, no. 4 (March, 1984): 862–863; Michael Tadmán, Review of Patterson, *The Economic History Review* 37, no. 1 (Feb., 1984): 164–165; Kristin Mann, *Slavery and the Birth of An African City: Lagos, 1760–1900* (Indiana University Press, 2007), 10–11; Alessandro Stanziani and Gwyn Campbell, “Introduction: Debt and Slavery in the Mediterranean and the Atlantic Worlds,” Campbell and Stanziani (eds.), *Debt and Slavery in the Mediterranean and Atlantic Worlds* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 1.

Middle Eastern slavery covered many modes, including military and elite slaves. Early modern Europeans were fascinated with Janissaries and other elite slaves, which, alongside concubines, have attracted most scholarly attention. The skewed focus on “nonproductive labor” promoted “the stereotype that most slaves in the region were elite slaves or domestics.” Current scholars seek to rectify this unbalance by shifting attention from elite slaves to other bondsmen. Matthew Hopper, for example, has demonstrated that Middle Eastern slavery and slave trade was in fact a “labor system...structured around global economic forces.” Defining such a sprawling system of bondage is a formidable challenge. Ehud Toledano has convincingly characterized Middle Eastern slaveries from copper miner to textile worker to Janissary, as “a form of patronage relationship, formed and often maintained by coercion but requiring a measure of mutuality and exchange that posits a complex web of reciprocity.”¹⁴

As this cursory overview indicates, the goal of locating a “universally acceptable definition” of slavery is elusive, even illusory.¹⁵ Therefore, I seek to locate Stephens’s Algerian years within the Middle Eastern and Mediterranean contexts in which it existed. Having thrust aside the shadow of Antebellum US slavery, we turn to examine key components of Barbary slavery like the method of enslavement, the several slaveries operating simultaneously in Algiers, elite and government roles of slaves, and the often temporary nature of this slavery.

Some exclude Barbary bondage of Christians as a form of slavery because of the way victims are enslaved. North Africans enslaved practitioners of religions other than Islam who were subjects of a non-Muslim state with which they were at war. Algiers announced they were at war with the United States in the summer of 1785. By July’s end, Algerian corsairs had netted two American vessels, the *Maria* and the *Dauphin*. The 21

¹⁴ Matthew S. Hopper, “Slaves of One Master,” in Robert Harms, Bernard K. Freamon, and David Blight (eds.) *Indian Ocean Slavery in the Age of Abolition* (Yale University Press, 2013), 224; Witzenthath, 3–5; Ehud Toledano, *As if Silent and Absent: Bonds of Enslavement in the Islamic Middle East* (Yale University, 2007), 8; Madeline C. Zilfi, *Women and Slavery in the Late Ottoman Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 13–15.

¹⁵ Suzanne Miers, “Slavery: A Question of Definition,” in Gwyn Campbell (ed.) *The Structure of Slavery in Indian Ocean Africa and Asia* (London: Frank Cass, 2004), 1–3. See also, Ehud Toledano, “The Concept of Slavery in Ottoman and Other Muslim Societies: Dichotomy or Continuum,” in Mura Toru and John Edward Philips (eds.) *Slave Elites in the Middle East and Africa: A Comparative Study* (Kegan Paul International, 2000): 159–175; Ehud Toledano *Slavery and Abolition in the Ottoman Middle East* (University of Washington Press, 1998), 158–168; Toledano, *As If Silent and Absent* (Yale University Press, 2007), 8.

crewmembers, all nominally Christian, were delivered to Algiers as slaves, where they merged with 3000 European bondspeople, all hoping for redemption and release.¹⁶

Many societies enslaved prisoners of war, though, as Orlando Patterson noted, not all prisoners of war became slaves. Some were killed or tortured. Others adopted, exchanged, or ransomed. In the New World, Native American prisoners faced “wide ranging experiences from death to adoption to slavery.” Captives might be sold to slave traders at the battle site, while others were sold later. Prisoners not killed, exchanged, or adopted, “were soon turned into slaves” when no ransom was paid. Even those sold quickly into slavery might be ransomed later, just as those whose ransom failed to materialize morphed into slavery. In some systems, in other words, no clear binary demarcated prisoner of war from slave. Rather, fluidity existed between the two categories.¹⁷

Warfare drew many into servitude during the ancient, medieval, and early modern periods. Roman law permitted prisoners won in a just war to be enslaved. Romans procured slaves through trade, slave reproduction, piracy, and warfare, but so many prisoners of war became bondsmen that a common term for slave was *captivus*.¹⁸ Following the Roman legal model, Byzantium recognized three paths to servitude: being born to a

¹⁶Chouki El Hamel, *Black Morocco: A History of Slavery, Race, and Islam* (Cambridge University Press, 2013), 56–57; Sears, 10–14. See also Jeffrey Fynn-Paul, “Empire, Monotheism, and Slavery in the Greater Mediterranean Region from Antiquity to the Early Modern Era,” *Past & Present* no. 205 (Nov. 2009): 3–40; Parker, 43. William Carmichael to Thomas Jefferson, 2 Sept 1785, *Founders Online*, National Archives; Richard O’Brien to Thomas Jefferson, 12 July 1790, *Founders Online*; Enclosure PR Randall to his Father, 2 April 1786, *Founders Online*.

¹⁷Christina Snyder, *Slavery in Indian Country* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), 5; Susan Migden Socolow, “Spanish Captives in Indian Societies,” *Hispanic American Historical Review* 72, is. 1 (Feb., 1992), 80; Suraiya Faruqi, “Quis Custodiet Custodes? Controlling Slave Identities and Slave Traders in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Istanbul,” in Eszter Andov and István György Tóth (eds) *Frontiers of Faith* (Budapest: Central European University, 2001), 121; Y Hakan Erdem, *Slavery in the Ottoman Empire and Its Demise, 1800–1909* (London: Macmillan Press, 1996), 30–31.

¹⁸Guasco, 3; Patterson, 40–31, 106–107; Youval Rotman, *Byzantine Slavery and the Mediterranean World* Translated by Jane Marie Todd (Harvard University Press, 2009), 29; Antony Honoré, “The Nature of Slavery,” in Jean Allain (ed.) *The Legal Understanding of Slavery* (Oxford University Press, 2012), 12; Keith Bradley, *Slavery and Society at Rome* (Cambridge University Press, 1994), 22, 32–35, 30; Oliva Remi Constable, “Muslim Spain and Mediterranean Slavery,” in Scott L. Waugh and Peter D. Diehl (eds.) *Christendom and Its Discontents* (Cambridge University Press, 1996), 266, 272.

slave mother, selling oneself into slavery and being “taken into captivity.” Youval Rotman identified four types of war captives: soldiers, defeated residents, those swept up in raids, and pirate victims. All were “designated by a single term: *aikhmalotos*,” a word related to the Greek for “to take into captivity.”¹⁹

Medieval Mediterranean powers, Christian and Muslim, also ruled that pagans and infidels were lawfully enslaved if captured in a just war, which included raids and corsair activity on both sides of the Mediterranean. Early modern Middle Easterners, Iberians, North Africans, and Europeans enslaved war captives. For example, in the ninth century, Arabs raided Crete’s coasts to seize slaves, and most fifteenth-century bondpeople in Valencia were “victims of corsair activity.” In the Iberian Peninsula, a slave might be termed *catiu de bona Guerra*; that is, captive of a good war.²⁰

In the early modern Mediterranean, slaves “typically originated as prisoners of war.” This method of enslavement was so common that sixteenth-century French people classified slaves as “either a Muslim abducted to Europe or a Christian abducted to North Africa.”²¹ Some of these slaves were redeemed, some sold into slavery; others enslaved but later ransomed; many must have died in slavery either before ransom was arranged or because no ransom was available. Thousands of Europeans experienced this firsthand. In the seventeenth century alone, 26,000 European slaves were redeemed from Ottoman Algiers. By the late eighteenth century, Christian slaves in Algiers numbered far fewer, between 600 and 3000, depending on the year.²²

Early Ottoman slavery fit into this larger Mediterranean pattern. Muslim law assigned slave status to those “born in slavery or captured in war.”²³ The

¹⁹ Rotman, 25, 27–28, 47–49.

²⁰ Quote from Blumenthal, 22. Constable, 265–266; Rotman, 47; Guasco, 44; Patterson, 41; Debra Blumenthal, *Enemies and Familiars: Slavery and Mastery in Fifteenth-Century Valencia* (Cornell University Press, 2009), 9–13, 20–28; Jukka Korpela, “The Baltic Finnic People in the Medieval and Pre-Modern Eastern European Slave Trade,” *Russian History* 41 (2014), 86–87; Blackburn, 49–53.

²¹ Guasco, 51; Zilfi, 142; Weiss, “Infidels at the Oar,” *Slavery and Abolition* 32, no. 3 (Sept 2011), 399.

²² Weiss, *Captives and Corsairs*, 10; Rotman, 50; Constable, 272; Pál Fodor, “Piracy, Ransom Slavery and Trade,” *Turcica* 33 (2001), 227; Daniel Panzac, *Barbary Corsairs: The End of a Legend, 1800–1820* trans. by Victoria Hobson and compiled by John E. Hawkes (Brill, 2005), 114–115; Ismael M. Montana, *The Abolition of Slavery in Ottoman Tunisia* (University Press of Florida, 2013), 17; Colley, 44–45.

²³ Halil Inalcik, “Servile Labor in the Ottoman Empire,” in Abraham Ascher, Tibor Halasi-kuri, and Bela K. Király (eds.) *The Mutual Effects of the Islamic and Judeo-Christian Worlds* (New York: Brooklyn College Press, 1979), 34. Bernard K. Freamon, “Definitions and

majority of slaves in early modern Bursa started as prisoners of war. Well into the seventeenth century, many Ottoman slaves started as “captives of war.” The enslaved population shifted over time, depending on the countries with which the Ottomans were at war or those from whom they could purchase slaves. Africans were only one source of their slaves.²⁴

As we have seen, captivity and slavery were frequently “entangled phenomena,” rather than clear-cut, well-defined groupings. Scholars of Russian slavery and serfdom confront similar overlap between serfs and slaves there. This holds true in the Middle East, as well. The Ottomans used numerous terms to designate slaves, which gives the impression of careful categorical precision. It is, however, mostly an impression. Ottomans used many terms for “human property,” but the “theoretical and legal differences between them were far less significant...than the contingent practices that bound them to the owner.”²⁵

Even when trying to delineate difference, the slippage between prisoner of war and slave is evident. Pál Fodor wrote, for example, that “prisoners of war and captives for ransom (*fidye, baha*) were called *esir/tutsak*... Neither in law nor in actuality was the *esir* a slave but could easily become one if he or she was not sufficiently valued to warrant a ransom demand, or if he or she could not raise the sum required.” When an *esir* technically crossed over to slavery is not clear, only that *esir* was the “first step on the road to slavery proper.” Stephens suffered in Algiers for 11 years. During those years, the American government tried, unsuccessfully, to free him and his crewmen. Did he move from captive to slave after the first failed attempt to negotiate ransom? The second? Was he continually “on the road to slavery proper” during those 11 years? To further complicate the issue, early Ottomans applied the term *miré esir* to war captives, a term Y. Erdem translates as state slaves *or* captives. In terms of experience on the ground, there appears to be more fungibility between categories than clear demarcation.²⁶

Conceptions of Slave Ownership in Islamic Law,” in Jean Allain (ed.) *The Legal Understanding of Slavery* (Oxford University Press, 2012), 42.

²⁴ Halil Sahiñoğlu, “Slaves in the Social and Economic Life of Bursa in the Late 15th and Early 16th Centuries,” *Turcica* 17 (1985), 65; Patterson, 105–107; Zilfi, 98–99, 104, 142–143; Toledano *Slavery and Abolition*, 21.

²⁵ Hanß and Schiel, 15–17; Witzernath, 17–18; Zilfi, 15; Pipes, xxvi, 195–196.

²⁶ Pál Fodor, “Introduction,” in Pál Fodor and Géza Dávid (eds.) *Ransom Slavery Along the Ottoman Borders* (Brill, 2007), xiv; Erdem, 30–31; Pipes 195–196.

Unstable categories are one problem facing those who seek to define slavery. Another is what Gillian Weiss termed “categorical shifts.” In the nineteenth century, chattel slavery in the US South was perceived as the definitive slavery. This was a seismic shift, a narrowing of the understanding of slaveries. As late as the sixteenth century, the French, and likely other Europeans, perceived *turcs*, Turkish galley slaves, as “real slaves.” *Turcs* “could gain release through ransom, exchange or treaty, could correspond with family members and transmit property,” and their servile state was not inherited. Like Stephens and his crew, *turcs* found that, though they were slaves, “liberty could be bought, negotiated, traded or won.”²⁷

As Stephens discovered, several forms of servitude existed side by side in Algiers. This was not terribly unusual as multiple forms of bondage concurrently functioned in many places. Roman slavery, for example, had a “diversity and variability” that defies facile description. Slavery in the Ottoman Empire was not a “coherent social phenomenon,” either; rather, slavery consisted of a “variety of modes.” As Ehud Toledano observed, the diverse modes of servility “constituted a major analytic impediment to the study of Ottoman slavery as a coherent social phenomenon.”²⁸ While not uncommon, this variety nevertheless complicates the issue of defining slavery. In Algiers, Janissaries, the historically elite military slaves, jostled alongside Christian bondsmen and African slaves. All three groups were enslaved by different processes; they lived and labored in distinct ways; and they had divergent levels of access to freedom.

Americans and Europeans knew more, or at least wrote more about, the high-status Algerian Janissaries than enslaved Africans. Perhaps “exotic” elite slaves riveted their attention or they saw African slaves as beneath their notice. Americans and Europeans probably interacted with Janissaries more often because Janissaries occupied government positions and supervised Christian slaves.²⁹ American and European reticence about African bondspeople in North Africa may be because the female domestic slaves worked in households, shielded from outsiders’ gazes. Janissaries were concentrated in Algiers or deployed together in garrisons. African slaves were widely owned in small groups, spread throughout the city and countryside.

²⁷ Weiss, “Infidels at the Oar,” 399, 406.

²⁸ Bradley, 4; Toledano, *Slavery and Abolition*, x, 3–5.

²⁹ Toledano, “Concept of Slavery,” 161.

Americans and Europeans were curious about the African slave trade to North Africa. American diplomat Noah Mordecai reported a “vast slave trade carried on” in the African desert, but neither he nor English consul James Matra could collect exact numbers of African slaves or trace to whom they were sold. In fact, relatively little is known about Ottoman African bondspeople generally, due to the lack of sources, a lacuna that also affects the North African states. One historian determined that between 1786 and 1814, the Tunisian caravan trade carried anywhere from a few hundred to thousands of slaves into North Africa yearly.³⁰ Scholars generally concur that around 2000 enslaved Africans could be found in Algiers, and that most of these were women serving in domestic capacities.³¹

Europeans in Algiers found these conclusions to be true. As one European witness reported, Algerians purchased black slaves from “Moorish” dealers. Those African slaves were then “employed in the houses of rich Moors.”³² Enslaved Americans and Europeans rarely entered private Algerian homes because they occupied public spaces, like the marine, markets, and quarries. Overnight, most were contained in the *bagnios*, or prisons. They might have seen African bondspeople at the markets or in passing on the streets. If they did, they did not record such encounters.

Still, African slaves seized European or American attention. Richard Jones noted when a sheik paid the Tripolitan Bashaw with 1000 negro slaves in 1818. No doubt the large number of slaves captured his attention. In 1815, a chagrined Jones complained that a negro slave accosted him. The slave’s owner, the infamous English renegade Peter Lyle—now

³⁰Noah Mordecai, *Travels in England, France, Spain, and the Barbary States in the Years 1813, 1814, and 1815* (New York: Kirk and Mercein, 1819), 302; James Matra to Lord Sydney, Tangier 12 November 1788, PRO 52/6, 375; Zilfi, 100–101, 131; Montana, 39, 41, 45.

³¹Fatiha Loualich, “The Emancipated Slaves Faced with the Jurisdiction of Algiers in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries,” *Oriente Moderno* 92, no. 2 (2013), 55; Dennis D. Cordell, “No Liberty, Not Much Equality, and Very Little Fraternity: The Mirage of Manumission in the Algerian Sahara in the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century,” in John B. Hattendorf (ed.), *Slavery and Colonial Rule in Africa* (Portland: Frank Cass, 2000), 41; Ahamed Alawad Sikainga, “Slavery and Muslim Jurisprudence in Morocco,” in Suzanne Miers and Martin A. Klein, (eds), *Slavery and Colonial Rule in Africa* (Portland: Frank Cass, 1999), 51; Mohammed El Mansour, *Morocco in the Reign of Mawlay Sulayman* (Cambridgeshire, England: Middle East and North African Studies Press Ltd., 1990), 44, 57–58.

³²Filippo Pananti, *Narrative of a Residence in Algiers* (Elibron Classics Reprint, 2005), 154–155; Sahilioglu, 46–47.

Admiral Murad Rais—refused to punish the offending African slave.³³ These sources point to elite Tripolitan ownership of African slaves, and American expectations of slaves' deference, but tell us little about the bondsmen themselves.

More is known about Janissaries in Algiers as they staffed the government and the *ocak*, the Algerian army. Starting in the Empire's early years, Ottomans recruited *kul*, the military-administrative slaves, through the *devshirme*. The *devshirme* was a levy of Christian boys from the Balkans. Through this process, Ottomans collected Christian boys and trained them in military or government work. Boys from the *devshirme* manned the Ottoman Empire's government or were members of the Janissary corps, a branch of the Ottoman army. *Devshirme* boys were "distinct from ordinary slaves" in "nomenclature, legal status, garb, and function," but they were the sultan's property. Some achieved wealth, power, and influence, yet they were marked by their slave origins.³⁴

The use of military-administrative slaves persisted into the nineteenth century, though the system changed over time. By the eighteenth century, the *devshirme* was abandoned because more freeborn men filled military and administrative positions. In the *devshirme*'s place, a new system procured and trained military-administrative slaves. In this new system, wealthy dignitaries purchased young male slaves, trained them in their household, and then placed them in either the army or bureaucracy. In this way, men of slave origins continued to staff bureaucracies and armies in Ottoman areas.³⁵

By the seventeenth century, Algiers was independent from the Ottoman Empire; however, the state continued to rely on Janissaries in both their

³³ Richard Jones to John Quincy Adams, 6 May 1818, 17 September 1815, Letterbook at Tripoli, 1814–1819 (Hagley Museum and Library, Wilmington, Delaware).

³⁴ Toledano, *Slavery and Abolition*, 21–24; Nadalo, 282; Zilfi, 100–102; Ehud Toledano, "The Emergence of Ottoman-Local Elites," in I. Pappé and M. Ma'oz (eds.) *Middle Eastern Politics and Ideas* (New York: Tauris Academic Studies, 1997), 151–2; Dror Ze'evi, "Kul and Getting Cooler: The Dissolution of Elite Collective Identity and the Formation of Official Nationalism in the Ottoman Empire," *Mediterranean Historical Review* 11, no. 2 (1996), 181, 187; Metin Ibrahim Kunt, "Ethnic-Regional (*Cins*) Solidarity in the Seventeenth-Century Ottoman Establishment," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 5 (1974), 233–239; Erdem, 2–3, 9. See also Charles Hamilton Argo, "Ottoman Political Spectacle: Reconsidering the Devşirme in the Ottoman Balkans, 1400–1700," (PhD. dissertation: University of Arkansas, 2005); Evgeni Radushev, "'Peasant' Janissaries?" *Journal of Social History* 42, no. 2 (Winter 2008), 448–9.

³⁵ Toledano, *Slavery and Abolition*, 24–25; Panzac, 71.

army and government. Algiers was ruled by Turks, most of whom were recruited as Janissaries from Anatolia. Government pay registers show about 12,000 Janissaries in seventeenth-century Algiers. By 1830, the number had declined to 4000. Most served in the city of Algiers, though some were dispersed to the provinces. Algiers was ruled by an Ottoman Turkish elite. Indigenous residents used an Algerian Arabic, but Turks spoke Ottoman Turkish. Turks followed Hanafi Islam, while most Algerians adhered to the Maliki school.³⁶

Algerian reliance on Janissaries ensured closer ties to the Ottoman Porte than the other Barbary States of Tunis and Tripoli. The Ottoman Sultan's permission was required to recruit Janissaries, for one thing. In addition, Turkish soldiers were “essential in Algiers,” where the local population was rarely permitted to enter the *ocak*, the Janissary-led military. Turks arrived often in late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Ottoman Algiers. In 1790, enslaved American Richard O'Brien watched a brig under “colours from the Levant” carry a necessary infusion of Turkish recruits into the port. “Janizaries” lived in barracks, which Cathcart described as six “handsome” buildings with large central courtyards. At least two barracks were named after Janissary quarters in Istanbul. Christian slaves were assigned to clean the barracks and care for the resident Janissaries. Between 1800 and 1830, at least 8500 Janissaries were recruited for the Algerian *ocak*.³⁷

The Turkish, Ottoman elite retained power by limiting intermarriage. Turkish Janissaries were discouraged from marrying, but if they had sons, those sons, called *kuloğlu* (sons of the sultan's slaves) were not generally allowed to join the *ocak*. The Dey, or ruler, of Algiers was a Turk elected by members of the *ocak* and *divan*, the ruling council also largely comprised of Turks, though it included local dignitaries and leaders. One of the longest ruling Algerian Deys, Mohammed ben-Osman was born in an Anatolian village, recruited for militia service, and ruled Algiers from 1766

³⁶ Algiers became an autonomous province in the eighteenth century. Tal Shuval, “The Ottoman Algerian Elite and Its Ideology,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 32 (2000), 324, 327, 334. American slave John Foss said public business done in “Turkish tongue.” Foss, 60, William Spencer, *Algiers in the Age of the Corsairs* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1976), 41, 43, 60–61, 70.

³⁷ Pananti, 40, 165, 208, 333–334, 341; Richard O'Brien, “Remarks and Observations in Algiers, 1789–1791” (Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Pennsylvania), 27 June 1790; Panzac, 63, 20; Cathcart, Account of Captivity, 120; Shuval, “Ottoman Elites,” 324–329, 331–333, 338.

to 1790. Of course, not all Janissaries rose to powerful positions. Those who did, and stories about them, loomed large in American and European imaginations as Europeans grappled with the idea that slaves were not necessarily the “lowest run in society.”³⁸

Christian slaves, as Algerians termed American and European bondspeople, were also found in Algiers. In 1785, Stephens and his crew were taken before Algiers’ ruler, the Dey. The Dey chose one-fifth of the new Christian slaves. Those the “King Don’t Take,” wrote one American victim, were “sold out Like horses in the West Indies.” All the Americans were owned by the Dey or the Regency, the Algerian government, so none personally endured a slave auction. At least, none recorded being sold at auction. Other observers record similar sales. Filippo Pananti, for example, witnessed 200 new Christians driven to a slave market that resembled auctions “formerly held in Jamaica.”³⁹

Though Stephens’s crew all belonged to the Dey or Regency, they were separated in other ways. European consuls took charge of Captain Stephens and his first mate Andrew Forsythe. They would do little work during their Algerian years. The Dey’s picks were destined for palace service. Their duties ranged from cleaning stables to serving coffee. The remainder of the men were sent to the *bagnios* and physically demanding labor. Thus, like Roman and other ancient slaveries, Algerian Christian slavery consisted of a very “diversified...pattern of employment.” Roman slaves were found in all occupations, except military service, a situation those in Algiers found true to their experience.⁴⁰

The English consul, Charles Logie, and the Spanish Consul, the Count D’Expilly, took the American captains and mates into their respective houses, clothed, and fed them. The consuls paid the Algerian government two to three dollars a month per man, a fee which conferred upon the men *papaluna* status. The Algerian state required a European consul or business

³⁸ Cathcart observed 6 Turkish barracks in Algiers. Shuval, “Otto Elites,” 324, 329; Tal Shuval, “Poor Quarter/Rich Quarter: Distribution of Wealth in the Arab Cities of the Ottoman Empire, The Case of Eighteenth-Century Algiers,” *Turcica* 32 (2000), 182; Cathcart, Library of Congress, 87, 92, 120; Panzac, 13, 20, 70–71; Spencer, 41, 60–61, 63; Parker, 16; Randall, 2 April 1786, *Founders Online*.

³⁹ The 15-year-old Dane Hark Oluf recounted being sold in an Algerian slave market. Martin Rheinheimer, “From Amrum to Algiers and Back Again,” *Central European History* 36, no. 2 (2003): 209–233; William Carmichael to Thomas Jefferson, 24 Oct 1785, *Founders Online*; Pananti, 74–75.

⁴⁰ Blackburn, 31; Bradley, 14, 58, 65.

person living in Algiers to vouch for each *papaluna*. This guarantor promised to reimburse the Algerian Regency if the *papaluna* he sponsored died, escaped, or behaved badly. During the 1780s and 1790s, only former officers were granted this status, which, for the monthly fee, freed them from most work and from *bagnio* living. In return, *papalunas* swore not to escape and were responsible for their own room and board.⁴¹

Generally, one's government covered the monthly fee and provided an allowance for food and housing. In the absence of such an allowance, consuls often supported captains and mates. Former officers were probably seen as more likely to pay the consul back or to persuade their country to reimburse their expenditures. European sponsors also judged officers as less risky in terms of their behavior, as compared to sailors.

After two US vessels were detained in 1786, four Americans were granted *papaluna* standing. For the American *papalunas* alone, then, the Algerian Regency collected 2 to 3 dollars a month per person, or as much as 8 to 12 dollars a month. The Regency paid nothing to maintain the men, either, as the sponsoring European covered such expenses. The former officers were free to “walk about the Streets,” visit other Europeans or Jewish residents of Algiers, patronize the markets, and imbibe at a local tavern. Even *papalunas* were called to work, though they were given lighter tasks. While most Christian slaves cleared out a storm-damaged magazine, for example, masters and mates worked in the sail loft, a job typically assigned to them.⁴²

Papalunas were a small minority of Christian slaves. The vast majority of European and American bondsmen reported daily to the marine or quarries and nightly to a *bagnio*. Marine duties covered several areas, but generally involved work related to maintaining the Algerian harbor and marine force. Some reported to workshops where coopers, carpenters, turners, masons, blacksmiths, or sailmakers oversaw their work. Many unloaded or loaded ships while many repaired the mole, the sea wall protecting the city's harbor from storms. Several describe working in gangs to quarry and

⁴¹ Memoranda Concerning Algiers [ca. Jan 1788] *Founders Online*, National Archives.

⁴² *Papaluna* derived from *pagar luna*, to pay by month. Parker, 10. To John Adams from Richard O'Bryen, Zacchaeus Coffin, 17 August 1785, *Founders Online*; Memoranda Concerning Algiers, [ca. Jan. 1788], *Founders Online*; From Thomas Jefferson to P  re Chauvier, 27 December 1788 *Founders Online*; Randall Enclosure to his Father, 2 April 1786, *Founders Online*. 24 December 1790, 55, 11, and 17 January 1791, Richard O'Bryen, “Remarks and Observations in Algiers, 1789–1791,” (Historical Society of Pennsylvania, PA).

then carry stones into Algiers, for public works or the mole. Several describe working in gangs to quarry and then carry stone into Algiers. Near the marine, “old slaves” made ropes and gaskets out of old ropes.⁴³

Approximately 68 American and European slaves toiled in the Dey’s palace. One of Stephens’s crewmen, James Cathcart, was selected for palace work and initially assigned to the Dey’s garden. There, he tended pigeons, grapes, and other produce with a small team of Christian slaves. Other palace slaves included blacksmiths who shoed the Dey’s horses; muleteers who carted away animal manure; and a few who cleaned fire-arms. Approximately 33 Christian slaves, none of them Americans, manned the Dey’s kitchen. These slaves were among the very few who were not housed nightly in a bagnio. Instead, they lived and slept in the “cook’s gallery” near the kitchen.⁴⁴

Not all Europeans and Americans in Algiers performed manual labor. Like some Roman and Ottoman slaves, a few in Algiers served an administrative function. In Ottoman Algiers, some positions could only be filled by Christian slaves. Several of these posts consisted of personal service to the Dey. For example, American sailor Phillip Sloan functioned briefly as the *captain a proa*. The person in this post personally attended the Dey. The *captain a proa* woke the Dey and lighted his way down stairs each morning. The Dey appointed two *cofeegis* to serve coffee to the Dey and his guests. In addition to this showy, ceremonial role, *cofeegis* superintended other Christian slaves. They received regular, and often large, tips from the Dey and his guests, making these lucrative positions.⁴⁵

Algerians used American and European slaves to supervise other Christian slaves. Each *bagnio* had a Clerk who accounted for slaves assigned to that prison, those who died, were ransomed, or reassigned. These Clerks called morning and evening roll in the *bagnio* and distributed food to *bagnio* slaves. James Cathcart was appointed Clerk of the Bagnio Gallera in 1788. The highest ranking administrative slave role was the Christian Secretary to the Dey, who kept accounts related to Christian slaves and their ransoms and corresponded on the ruler’s behalf with European and American powers. Cathcart was elevated to this position in 1794.⁴⁶

⁴³ Cathcart, Library of Congress, 22, 81, 86, 128; Panzac, 56; Foss, 26–27; O’Brien, Remarks, 23 November, 1790; Pananti, 88–89; Randall to his Father, 2 April 1786, *Founders Online*.

⁴⁴ Cathcart, Library of Congress, 19–20, 29, 114; Cathcart, *Captives*, 16.

⁴⁵ Bradley, 3; Cathcart, Library of Congress, 155, 129, 19.

⁴⁶ The Bagnio Gallera was also known as the Prison of Galley Slaves. Pipes has discussed the widespread use of government slaves in Rome, the Middle East, and other systems. Cathcart,

Like Ottoman slavery, Algerian bondage of Christians permitted upward mobility among the bondsmen. Between six and eight Christian slaves attended the Secretary of the Marine, and like most administrative posts, these came with perks: in this case, Fridays off, occasional tips, and good food. The Christian Secretary for the Dey received a private suite of rooms and ownership of a *bagnio* tavern and the proceeds from that business. Perhaps the best advantage the Secretary gained was freedom when the Algerian Regency concluded a treaty with any country. Any treaty agreement, with any country, included a provision to redeem the Secretary to the Dey.⁴⁷

Administrative slaves who were ransomed might do quite well for themselves. Angiolo Ferraro's story mirrors that of *devshirme* boys trained for Ottoman administrative service. When he was a child, Algerian corsairs snatched him off a Neapolitan fishing boat. He was subsequently enslaved in the Dey's palace where he learned to read and write. He advanced through elite slave positions until the apparently grateful Dey granted him his freedom and a "handsome present besides." As a free man, he invested with Ciddi Aly, an Algerian worthy, with whom he travelled to Istanbul and made his fortune.⁴⁸

Cathcart also advanced through the Algerian slave system during his 11 years in Algiers. He was captured in his late teens or early 20s as an ordinary sailor. He rose through the Algerian Christian slave ranks to the Christian Secretary to the Dey. After he was ransomed in 1796, he was appointed US consul to Tripoli, an unlikely post for most former ordinary sailors.⁴⁹

Different forms of bondage were found in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Algiers. Relatively little is known about African slaves, who made up perhaps 4% of the city's population. These slaves seem to have been freed far less often than Christian slaves although this picture may change as scholars uncover more about their lives. Janissaries derived from slave origins, particularly early in the Ottoman Empire. Their status in terms of enslavement is less

Library of Congress, 68, 132–134; Cathcart, *Captives*, 14; Sears, 75–79; Parker, 89–91; Pipes, 11–12.

⁴⁷ Cathcart, "Journal of Remarkable Events in the Regency of Algiers," Papers of James L. Cathcart, 1785–1817 (Library of Congress, Manuscript Reading Room, Washington, D.C.), 17 July 1792, 4 November 1792; Sears, 75–79. For more on slavery as social mobility, see Witzenrath, 42, and Blackburn 4–5.

⁴⁸ Sears, 76. Danish sailor Hark Olufs's Algerian trajectory was even more in line with the *devshirme*. Rheimhermier, 210–211.

⁴⁹ Sears, 75–85; Parker, 88–91, 134.

clear by this period. Christian slaves in Algiers could serve in elite positions, which gave them a social mobility of sorts. While we do not know precisely what percentage were redeemed, they seem to be ransomed at a high rate.

Access to manumission is perhaps the biggest difference between Algerian Christian enslavement and New World or US slaveries. The comparison is stark. Orlando Patterson designated the manumission rate in the southern United States as “one of the lowest of all slave systems.” In contrast, he rated manumission among Christian Barbary bondsmen high. Manumission was severely limited in the New World and the United States, but this is not true for other slave systems, particularly those around the Mediterranean and in the Middle East.⁵⁰

Roman slaves were afforded comparatively high rates of manumission, several paths to freedom, and a legal process through which freedpeople could become citizens. As explained by Keith Bradley, however, if the “act of manumission was commonplace” in Rome, it did not mean that “most Roman slaves were set free.” Slavery in the Mediterranean has been perceived as “but a temporary condition” because multiple methods to manumit bondpeople also existed there. Slaves could be redeemed, purchase their freedom, or freed in a will. If a master was willing, a slave could enter into service contract whereby they performed a certain amount of work in exchange for their freedom.⁵¹ But, as in the Roman Empire, multiple methods did not result in most or even a majority of slaves being freed.

Ottomans also provided multiple paths to emancipate slaves, though, again, it does not follow that most Ottoman slaves were freed. Islamic law allowed “ways for slaves to bargain...to cut short their servitude.” The Empire recognized more than one master-slave contract in which slaves exchanged an agreed-upon monetary amount or services for freedom. A master and slave might sign a *kitāba*, for example, which prevented a slave from being sold while he worked to pay off his freedom. Another limited term contract, the *mukataba*, was available to skilled slaves, particularly those working in Bursa’s textile industry. These contracts were normally witnessed and registered in courts. In either case, masters essentially agreed to let a slave “ransom [him]self with earnings.”⁵²

⁵⁰ Patterson, 217, 277; Eugene Genovese, “The Treatment of Slaves in Different Counties: Problems in the Applications of the Comparative Method,” in Laura Foner and Eugene Genovese (eds.) *Slavery in the New World* (Prentice Hall, 1969), 203.

⁵¹ Bradley, 154–155, 162; Blumenthal, 194–195, 200–201, 207.

⁵² A similar contract was seen in West Africa along with opportunities for ransom, according to Lovejoy. Paul E. Lovejoy, “Muslim Freedmen in the Atlantic World,” in Paul

Other slave systems allowed manumission to varying degrees. In Dutch New York, corporate slaves who “worked hard and faithfully” for the Dutch East India Company were promised freedom. In 1644, a group of African slaves petitioned for freedom on these grounds. They were freed, along with their wives, and each allocated Manhattan farmland as freedom dues. South American slaveries also permitted manumission through various forms, including the *cartas de alforria*, the notarized certificate in which owner and slave agreed to terms for the slave’s release.⁵³

In the Ottoman Empire, slave manumission was not an exceptional event, though, like Roman slaves, most were not released from bondage. Slaves were manumitted at a high enough rate that slavery gained an “appearance of impermanence.” This may apply to Barbary slavery as well, though the precise rate of ransom there is hard to deduce. Early modern ransom rates may have been lower than in later periods. By the late eighteenth century, most Algerian Christian slaves were ransomed when their country paid to free them through a treaty arrangement with Algiers. In Tunis, diplomat Noah Mordecai spoke to several Christian slaves owned by the Tunisian ruler. Many had been enslaved more than 20 years and had long since given up on redemption.⁵⁴ Americans in Algiers similarly reported that some of their fellow slaves had long been enslaved in the city. Of the 139 Americans held by Algerians in the 1780s and 1790s, 76% were ransomed before or by a US-Algerian treaty signed in 1796.⁵⁵ The rest died, still enslaved, before they were redeemed.

While no doubt life-changing for individual slaves, manumission did not usually “materially upset [a] slave system.” In locations with high rates of manumission, a steady influx of new bondspeople, often through war, maintained the slave population. Certainly, this was the case in Algiers and other Barbary States, where corsairs hauled in a steady flow of Christians. Orlando

E. Lovejoy (ed.) *Slavery on the Frontiers of Islam* (Markus Wiener Publishers, 2004), 244; Marmon, “Domestic Slavery in the Mamluk Empire,” in *Slavery in Islamic Middle East*, 7, 10; Sahilöglü, Bursa, 53, 57; Inalcik, 27–28; Zilfi, 108; Yvonne Seng, “Fugitives and Factotums: Slaves in Early Sixteenth-Century Istanbul,” *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 39, no. 2 (May 1996), 142.

⁵³ Morton, Wagman, “Corporate Slavery in New Netherlands,” *The Journal of Negro History* 65, no. 1 (Winter 1980), 38–39; Mariana Dantas, *Black Townsmen: Urban Slavery and Freedom in the Eighteenth-Century Americas* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 98, 103.

⁵⁴ Zilfi, 15, 123. Miers, 4; Patterson, 114–115; Mordecai, 321; Davis, 170–171.

⁵⁵ Sears, 157; Weiss, *Captives and Corsairs*, 10. For more on ransom slavery, see Jennifer Lofkrantz and Olatunji Ojo, “Slavery, Freedom, and Failed Ransom Negotiations in West Africa, 1730–1900,” *The Journal of African History* Vol. 53, no. 1 (2012): 25–44.

Patterson speculated that the need for skilled manpower led the Barbary States to free unskilled slaves. He claimed that Algerians and other Barbary States discouraged unskilled Christian slaves from converting and becoming renegades who lived as freedpeople in Algiers. Algerian leaders may well have preferred skilled persons as renegades. However, Christian slaves executed important unskilled labor on public works and quarrying that cannot be discounted. In any event, neither renegades nor ransomed slaves curtailed or ended slavery in Algiers. Rather, manumission “served primarily the interests of the slave owners” in maintaining the slave system overall.⁵⁶

In today’s world, slave and slavery appear to have “precise meanings,” but only due to the tendency to associate the institution and its victims with the American antebellum South’s system. Historically, the meanings were less clear, at least from our vantage point. Slavery has not always been the antithesis of freedom. Instead of a binary, a slew of unfree categories ranged between freedom and not free. More “fluidity and ambiguity” existed between those two poles, with alternatives from “temporary bondage to hereditary slavery.” For these reasons, slaveries can only be described and understood within the context they existed.⁵⁷

If, as Sean Stilwell argues, slavery is “composed of a bundle of traits,” what are the traits of Christian slavery in Barbary? Slaves were taken at sea, ostensibly in war. Such a prisoner could be enslaved if he or she were not Muslim and not the subject of a Muslim polity. Christian slaves, then, were made by “religion and mischance,”⁵⁸ not due to race or hereditary. Such slaves were legally owned and could be sold. Their mobility was limited to the city of Algiers, or the location in which they were held. As a way of minimizing the fiscal burden on the Algerian state, Christian slaves received news, letters, and money from people outside Algiers. They spent that money in the Algerian economy as they paid the Regency for room upgrades, better food, bribes to avoid work, or in the city markets they were permitted to visit.

Most were found toiling at assigned manual tasks. A few Christian slaves purchased the designation *papaluna*, after which they labored little. As in Rome and the Middle East, many slaves performed non-menial work and some did tasks “geared to the capacities of the imperial state.” Some slaves achieved high positions and some wealth, just as a few bondsmen

⁵⁶ Patterson, 277; Bradley, 163.

⁵⁷ Rotman, 81; Snyder, 6.

⁵⁸ Stilwell, 5; Weiss, *Captives and Corsairs*, 3.

might in Roman or Ottoman lands, where slavery was a “great facilitator of social mobility.”⁵⁹ Algerians gained both profit and labor from their Christian slaves. Profit derived from ransom and from slaves’ payments for perks and privileges. At the same time, Algerians benefited from Christian slaves’ labor, skilled, unskilled, and bureaucratic. Lastly, Algerian Christian slaves were often, though not always, short-term, temporary slaves, not lifelong bondsmen.

Algerian ransom slavery was in line with Mediterranean—both European and Middle Eastern—forms of bondage. This variant shared many characteristics with Roman, early modern Mediterranean, and Ottoman Empire slave systems. These variants were somewhat familiar to early modern and eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century individuals, in the East and West. Stephens’s years in Algiers did not resemble antebellum US slavery. But it did parallel older and current systems operating in the Mediterranean and Middle East and, thus, would have been recognized as slavery as practiced in that time and place.

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⁵⁹ Blackburn, 10, 4–5.



The “Slave Wife” Between Private Household and Public Order in Colonial Algeria (1848–1906)

Sarah Ghabrial

In 1906, almost 60 years after the 1848 declaration abolishing slavery throughout the French empire, the French colonial government issued the final and most comprehensive piece of anti-slavery legislation in Algeria. This decree was meant to dispel any confusion and inconsistency in previous laws by clearly delineating commercial acts considered illicit and uniformly applying punishments—particularly to colonial non-citizen subjects, to whom the original 1848 legislation was not applicable. The impetus for this law came from an influx of reports from the Mزاب valley and other central oases towns showing a continued and even expanding trade in women from sub-Saharan Africa. Governor General Jonnart, however, made clear in his comments on drafts of the decree that the final version of the law should be limited in one crucial respect. Subsequently, the 1906 decree included a fourth clause assuring that:

S. Ghabrial (✉)

Department of History, Concordia University, Montreal, QC, Canada

e-mail: sarah.ghabrial@concordia.ca

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The foregoing provisions are without prejudice to the rights resulting of paternal power, guardianship or marriage over minors or married women, in so much as acts performed do not constitute temporary or permanent servitude for the benefit of those other than these minor or women.¹

Though clearly an attempt to obviate certain gendered servile statuses, this clause brings to our attention a critical axis of patriarchal dominion, sexual politics, and concepts of privacy and “family” in the age of emancipation.

The 1906 decree and its notable caveat serve as a point of departure into this chapter’s investigation into intersecting histories of bondage, emancipation, colonialism, and articulations of “family” in Algeria in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Until recently, most studies dealing with slavery and its demise in the Maghreb have tended to focus on emancipation and public law measures, such as taxation, incarceration, police and seizure measures, laws delimiting the “legitimacy” or “illegitimacy” of certain kinds of overland and maritime commerce, and so on, thus privileging the concerns and views of local and colonial male authorities.² Some of these authors have shown the tragic outcomes of the disparity between Republican notions of equality and liberty, on the one hand, and colonial politics and alignments with local male elites, on the other. While indebted to the groundwork they have laid, this chapter takes a different approach, following the lead of feminist historians of the Middle East and North Africa who have contextualized slavery and its demise as central to social histories of “the family” in the modern period.³ In tracing

¹ *Bulletin officiel du Gouvernement général de l’Algérie* (15 July 1906, No. 486): « Décret relatif aux peines encourues par quiconque, en Algérie et dans les Territoires du Sud, aura conclu une convention ayant pour objet d’aliéner, soit à titre gratuit, soit à titre onéreux, la liberté d’une tierce personne »: p. 756.

² Examples from the literature on nineteenth-century Algeria include: Benjamin C. Brower, *A Desert Named Peace: The Violence of France’s Empire in the Algerian Sahara, 1844–1902* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009); Dennis D. Cordell, “No liberty, not much equality, and very little fraternity: The mirage of manumission in the Algerian Sahara in the second half of the nineteenth Century,” *Slavery & Abolition* 19.2 (1998): 38–56; Raëd Bader, “L’esclavage dans l’Algérie coloniale, 1830–1870”. *Mağalla Al-Tarīkiyya Al-Mağribiyya (Li-Al-‘ahd Al-Ḥadīṭ Wa-Al-Mu’āşir)* 26. 93/94 (1999): 57–69; Ismael Musah Montana and Ehud R. Toledano, *The abolition of slavery in Ottoman Tunisia*. Gainesville (University Press of Florida, 2013).

³ See especially Eve Troutt Powell, *Tell This in My Memory: Stories of Enslavement from Egypt, Sudan, and the Ottoman Empire* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2012); Diane

these histories, I attempt to unpack the gendered and sexualized meanings of bondage and "freedom" in Algeria across a tangled web of subservient and conjugal statuses.

My argument is grounded in the premise that the gendered and sexualized aspects of women's bondage in Algeria defied French normative legal categories surrounding slavery and "freedom." The women and girls trafficked from sub-Saharan Africa were often sought by local men for both their productive and sexual labour, thus designating many of these women as "concubines." This category was unstable in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries for numerous reasons, including regional economic uncertainty and upheavals within the very household structures to which slave women were attached, as well as the unintelligibility of certain forms of particularly female servitude to French observers. This is shown through cases where women and girls fled masters who claimed to be their husbands, as well as incidents of women suing for divorce where manumission was unobtainable, and finally—and perhaps most tellingly—in cases involving children. Throughout these episodes, different actors mobilized varying idioms of "family," whether male authorities working to privatize women's exploitation, or slaves whose actions challenged false representations of their condition.

The analysis offered here is mainly enabled by a rich and largely untapped archive: documents and photographs left by a prominent abolitionist missionary order known as the White Fathers and White Sisters, and the slave and ex-slave women whose lives they briefly touched and often recorded. For this Catholic order, these sub-Saharan women figured as perpetual "orphans," lacking kinship ties and social networks, and were thus ideal candidates for conversion. These records are populated by numerous slave and fugitive women, some who stayed with the Sisters, some who moved on to find new opportunities, and some who eventually lost their cases against their masters and were forced by colonial authorities to return to "the conjugal home." These records are supplemented by other documents found in French colonial and Algerian national archives.

Robinson-Dunn, *The Harem, Slavery and British Imperial Culture: Anglo-Muslim Relations in the Late Nineteenth Century* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006); Beth Baron, *Egypt As a Woman: Nationalism, Gender, and Politics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005); and Judith E. Tucker, *Women in Nineteenth-Century Egypt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

PART I: THE MZAB AND THE TRANS-SAHARAN TRADE

French jurist Edmond Norès, writing in 1930 on the occasion of the colonial centenary, offered a narrative of the French colonial enterprise in Algeria in which the abolition of the trans-Saharan slave trade was a foretelling example of the efficacy and benevolence of the French presence. And yet, wrote Norès, the Black slaves of Algeria “were not generally misfortunate, with the exception that those of the feminine sex were subject to the brutal lechery of their masters.”⁴ This version of events had two effects: first, it obscured French complicity in perpetuating slavery; second, and more important for our purposes, it dramatized the role they had played (and, he implied, should continue to play) as the saviours of women subject to rapacious indigenous male lusts. The realities of what happened to bonded women in southern Algeria were, unsurprisingly, more complicated.

Only some years after the landmark 1848 abolition declaration, strategic interest in the Sahara drew French attention to the Mzab and other oases towns on the desert’s threshold. French advances on the Mzab began with overtures made in 1853, as the military colonial state continued its advance into the desert, with an eye to profiting from the lucrative trans-Saharan trade. It did not escape the notice of military officials that slaves were well known to be the most important commodity transported into North Africa.⁵ Indeed, field reports show French officers declaring openly that all other commodities, including ivory and ostrich feathers, “are nothing but accessories” to the trade in slaves.⁶

Since the eighth century, the Mzab’s position on the threshold of the Sahara placed it among the key trade hubs and markets of the trans-Saharan trade, particularly for various Tuareg clans who specialized in

⁴ Edmond Norès, *L'oeuvre de la France en Algérie: La Justice* (Paris: Félix Alcan, 1931): pp. 84–85.

⁵ Though most important, slaves were not, of course, the only commodities of the caravan trade. Merchants arrived in the south with weapons, books, spices, perfumes, manufactured textiles, and carpets which they sold or traded for slaves, leather products, ostrich feathers, gum, wax, ivory, and kola nuts. Adu Boden, “The Caravan Trade in the Nineteenth-Century,” *The Journal of African History* 3. 2 (1962): pp. 357–358. See also Ghislaine Lydon, *On trans-Saharan trails: Islamic law, trade networks, and cross-cultural exchange in nineteenth-century Western Africa* (New York, N.Y: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

⁶ Archives Nationales d’Outre-mer (ANOM) 22H/26. July 23, 1876, Secretary General of the Chamber of Commerce, “Au sujet des mesures à prendre pour l’extension de ce commerce (de l’intérieur de l’Afrique).”

long-distance merchant activity across the west-central Sahara.⁷ By the nineteenth century, many of the slaves originated in what is today northern Nigeria and the lands around Lake Chad.⁸ Upon arrival in the major market towns of the Algerian interior, some of the slaves would be immediately sold, while others were held to recuperate from the gruelling journey. They were taught basic Arabic (if they did not already know it) and the precepts of Islam.⁹ Slave traders usually collected captives through intermediaries or by conducting their own raids on villages, themselves, and were not opposed to seeking captives in known Muslim regions.¹⁰

It is difficult to tell precisely how many people of sub-Saharan origin, and of them how many slaves, were living in Algeria at time of French conquest. Ralph A. Austen estimates that of 1,855,000 slaves bound for the Maghreb, the Ottoman Empire, Egypt, and Arabia between 1800 and 1900, some 65,000 were sold in the Algerian southern territories.¹¹ Contemporaneous reports are complicated by various factors, as pointed out by Yacine Daddi Addoun, including the constantly fluctuating "borders" around French territory at this time, and the desire by many French observers to misrepresent the numbers in whichever direction. For instance, the Ministry of War suggested a modest figure of 1054 slaves, of which 942 were female and only 112 male,¹² while the Ministry of the

⁷ E. Savage, "Berbers and Blacks: Ibāḍī Slave Traffic in Eighth-Century North Africa," *The Journal of African History* 33, 3 (1992): pp. 351–368.

⁸ Boden, "The Caravan Trade": p. 350. See also Ehud Toledano, *The Ottoman Slave Trade and its Suppression, 1840–1890* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982).

⁹ Benjamin C. Brower, *A Desert Named Peace: The Violence of France's Empire in the Algerian Sahara, 1844–1902* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009): pp. 156–158.

¹⁰ It has been argued that the high probability of Muslims falling into slavery through the trans-Saharan trade sparked the debate, which eventually ended slavery in Tunisia in 1846. Proscriptions against taking slaves from known or potentially Muslim-inhabited lands had occupied the minds of jurists in the Maghreb since the earliest days of this long-distance commerce. Montana and Toledano, *The abolition of slavery in Ottoman Tunisia*. See also: Ahmad Baba, "Mi'raj al-Su'ud, Ahmad Baba's Replies on Slavery," in John Hunwick and Fatima Harrack (ed. and trans.), *Textes et Documents* (University Mohammed V, Institute of African Studies, 2000): pp. 7–65.

¹¹ Ralph A. Austen, "The trans-Saharan slave trade: a tentative census," in H.A. Gemery and J.S. Hogendorn (eds.), *Uncommon Market; Essays in the Economic History of the Atlantic Slave Trade* (New York: Academic Press, 1979): p. 66.

¹² Henri Duveyrier, "Ghadâmes, un centre d'esclavage de quelque importance," *Journal de Route* (Leselle, 1860): p. 15. See also: R. Bader, "L'esclavage dans l'Algérie coloniale": p. 59.

Interior counted 4300 slaves.¹³ In 1860, a military report estimated that between 9,000 and 10,000 slaves lived in the major oases towns of Biskra, Ouargla, Ghardaïa, Laghouat, and Timimoun.¹⁴ Despite such wide differences in numbers, all agreed (and other records reflect) that women outnumbered men at least three to one. Writing in 1884, one observer recorded a male captive, aged 15 years old, sold in the Mزاب for 300–500 francs. Meanwhile, a young woman of the same age could fetch up to 1,000 francs.¹⁵

Year-round, the Mزاب was home to various groups, including Jews, Arabs, orbiting villages of freed sub-Saharan Africans and Haratin,¹⁶ and, most predominantly, a population of Tumẓabt-speaking Berbers who adhered to the Ibadi school of Islam. Over the decades since the conquest of Algiers, the Mزاب had also attracted some European traders seeking their fortunes in what was to them a rough and remote outpost.

In November of 1880, in order to secure the Mزاب as a French protectorate, General de la Tour d'Auvergne signed an agreement pledging respect for all “traditional institutions,” including municipal governments, leadership, and the “free exercise” of Ibadism and local customary laws. They also guaranteed that the practice of all commercial activity would remain “as it was in the past.”¹⁷ Even as they promised this, however, the Saharan trade was in the midst of a major reorientation, with caravans steadily re-routing west to Morocco and east to Tripoli.

¹³ Marcel Émerit, *La Révolution de 1848 en Algérie* (Paris: Larose, 1949): p. 30.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 39.

¹⁵ Adolphe de Calassanti-Motyliniski, *Notes historiques sur le Mزاب. Guerara depuis sa fondation* (Alger: A. Jordan, 1885), writes: “C’est. de ce point qu’arrivaient toutes les caravanes d’esclaves destinés à être vendus sur les marchés du Mزاب. Les Nègres amenés étaient, presque tous, des enfants de 14 à 15 ans; ils appartenaient aux populations du Haut-Niger, de Timbouctou, du Haoussa, du Bornou, du Bambara et même aux Foulanes. Un jeune Nègre se vendait de 300 à 500 francs. Les jeunes filles esclaves, les plus haut cotées, atteignaient parfois le prix de 1000 francs.”

¹⁶ It should be noted that sub-Saharan Africans were not the only group whose skin tone marked them out for particular kinds of labour. The Haratin (singular: Hartani) were a subgroup of dark-skinned people indigenous to Algeria who were not slaves but performed toilsome menial and agricultural work. Haratin were often grouped as “noirs” in colonial records, while the word “nègre” usually indicated slave and the word “esclave,” if not otherwise qualified, almost always meant Black.

¹⁷ Nil-Joseph Robin, *Le Mزاب et son annexion à la France* (Alger: Adolphe Jourdan, 1884): p. 52.

The Mزاب's diverse population was thus facing unprecedented economic uncertainty by the time the White Fathers and Sisters established themselves there in the late 1880s. The order of the White Fathers was founded in 1867 by the Archbishop of Algiers, Charles Martal Lavigerie, to proselytize Algerian Muslims, despite government prohibition. Lavigerie had become a household name throughout Europe, celebrated for having revived the abolitionist movement and shifting its focus onto the African internal and "Arab" slave trades. He personally lobbied European heads of state to end slave trading across the Sahara and the Swahili coast through a new "crusade" and the aggressive assertion of European civilization. Susan Miers attributes the Brussels Act of 1890, and subsequent European "scramble" for Africa, largely to Lavigerie's efforts.¹⁸

The White Fathers first embarked into the desert as the militant "Frères Armées," a kind of soldier-monk league funded and armed by the French Ministry of War. The military government's experiment with the Armed Brothers did not last long, and as Lavigerie turned to new, subtler methods to reach Muslims in Algeria, he founded the order of the White Sisters on the conviction that "it is only by women that Africa will be saved."¹⁹ The White Sisters were primarily tasked with "penetrating the Harem" and thus expanding the missionaries' outreach to women and children who were thought less "fanatical" than Muslim men. Notwithstanding the missionaries' paternalistic approach, it happened that the White Sisters did gain insight into the domestic worlds of women and slaves and, moreover, proved a critical resource for escaped slave women (as detailed in the next section). The daily logs kept by the White Sisters and circulated only within the order itself provide an invaluable source of information on the lives of domestic slaves who lived in the Mزاب and elsewhere in North Africa. It must be remembered, meanwhile, that the Sisters were invested in these women, above all, as potential converts, and were thus motivated to focus on suffering and de-emphasize less exploitative master-slave relationships.

Until the transition in the northern Algerian territories to civilian government in 1871, coinciding with re-mounting abolitionist pressure from the metropole, any interest in slavery expressed by the military

¹⁸ Suzanne Miers, *Britain and the ending of the slave trade* (New York: Africana Pub. Corp 1975): pp. 201–205.

¹⁹ White Fathers General Archives, Rome, Italy. Charles M. Lavigerie, "Speech before the London Missionary Society," 1889.

administration was manifest primarily as an excuse to expand their policing prerogatives further south.²⁰ But upon taking control of these regions, they found excuses for *not* taking action to suppress slavery that will sound familiar to scholars of late nineteenth-century colonial abolitionism.

The leader of the brutal French campaign in Algeria and later its first colonial Governor General, Thomas Bugeaud, set a contemptuous tone for the military point of view on abolition:

You have conquered them, they have bowed their heads under the yoke of force, but if they are resigned [to French control] it is because they believe that you will keep your promises to respect their religion, their customs, and their property. [...] They enjoy the same lifestyle; they are only rarely mistreated, *the Arabs often marry black women*, and children born of concubines are treated exactly as the others.²¹

Subsequently, military administrator and head of the *Bureaux arabes* under Bugeaud, General Eugène Daumas, reported in 1848 that the immediate abolition of slavery in Algeria was unadvisable; as “Christian rulers of a Muslim land,” they would risk the alienation and even rebellion of local leaders by depriving them of an important element in their familial, social, and commercial order. Indeed, in 1849, just one year after universal abolition, a directive to tolerate slavery in Algeria was issued upon Daumas’ recommendation.

These and other colonial policy-makers promoted the argument that interference with slavery constituted interference with the “free practice” of Islam, something enshrined in every treaty between local Muslim leaders and the conquering French since the 1831 capitulation. This justification was disingenuous on numerous counts. First, neighbouring Tunisia had outlawed slavery in 1846, two years before France, largely on the basis of juristic support from the ‘*ulama*.²² Moreover, by this point, French jurisdiction had been asserted in all areas of public law, including taxation, commercial, penal, and property law, leaving the domain of “personal

²⁰ Brower (2009) details the contradictions surrounding slavery within the scheme of “Saharan pacification” in Chap. 9.

²¹ Cordell, “No liberty, not much equality, and very little fraternity”: pp. 39–40. Emphasis mine.

²² Montana and Toledano, *The abolition of slavery in Ottoman Tunisia*. See also Ismael Musah Montana, “The Trans-Saharan Slave Trade of Ottoman Tunisia, 1574 to 1782,” *The Maghreb Review Majallat Al-Maghrib* 33.2 (2008): pp. 132–150.

status" law to Muslim legal authorities. Therefore, to advance such an argument entailed conceptually shunting slavery to the "private sphere" in a way that was foreign to French law. Indeed, Bugeaud, Daumas, and others who protested outlawing slavery were above all wary of disrupting local patriarchal hierarchies that held tribal and agnatic kinship structures together and upon which they relied for building alliances, thwarting rebellions, and maintaining the economic stability of the trans-Saharan trade.²³ As both Brower and Addoun have also uncovered, the French were haunted by fears of labour shortages, which, coupled with visions of "Arab decline" (and even extermination) in Algeria, even prompted schemes to "rejuvenate" the internal African slave trade under various guises.²⁴

What of the specific claims regarding women's slavery? It is highly unlikely that, as Bugeaud claimed, masters entered into marriage with bonded women in the same way they would a free woman, as the distinction between wifhood and concubinage were clear in Islamic law. Despite this misreading, such assurances were repeated and reinforced throughout subsequent military reports and travelogues, creating an image of "marriage" to Black women that softened slavery in the Algerian interior:

The Muslims have never had in North Africa slaves like those [...] of the new world, who are burdened with constant and punishing labour. Their [Muslims'] slaves are rather taken as domestics, are married to their masters' *négresses*, who just as often marry their *négresses* themselves. The condition of these *nègres* is definite and very gentle [*très douce*].²⁵

Prior to French incursion, it was indeed the case that in Algeria, like elsewhere in the Muslim world, bondswomen who gave birth to their master's children, called *umm al-walad* (mother of the child) were entitled to certain rights and benefits, as well as a path out of slavery not available to men.²⁶ Despite no clear juristic consensus on the conditions

²³ Cordell, "No liberty, not much equality, and very little fraternity": pp. 52–55.

²⁴ Brower, *A Desert Named Peace*. Yacine Daddi Addoun, *L'Abolition de l'esclavage en Algérie: 1816–1871*, PhD thesis, York University, 2010. The idea to rejuvenate or "refleurir" comes from a report by the Oran Chambre of Commerce, 9 October 1879. ANOM 22H/26.

²⁵ Paul Soleillet, *L'Afrique occidentale: Algérie, Mzab, Tildikelt* (Avignon, 1877).

²⁶ Fatiha Loualich, "Emancipated female slaves in Algiers: marriage, property and social advancement in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries" in Stephanie Cronin (ed.),

by which an *umm al-walad* might be manumitted, by and large, convention upheld the rights of a concubine upon pregnancy with her master's child and his acknowledgment of paternity: that she could no longer be sold, and that his child acquired free status and may become an heir to his estate. As Elke Stockreiter observes, though not all slave women were concubines, all slave women had the potential to access this path out of bondage, since masters may avail themselves of their unwed domestic slaves' sexual labour.²⁷

Though our knowledge of domestic life and slavery, even of elites, is less clear for pre-colonial Algeria than, for instance, the northern tier of the Ottoman Empire, evidence suggests similar operations of hierarchy and entitlement. For instance, the son of an Ottoman official with a Black slave woman was accorded a higher social status than the son of two free-born individuals.²⁸ In the Mzab, in spite of disputes with respect to some details within Ibadi jurisprudence, the rights of the *umm al-walad* were generally recognized and protected. We also know somewhat more about women's domestic slavery in Zanzibar, the most a more prominent centre of Ibadism in the nineteenth century, and the importance of concubines for the production and prestige of honourable households.²⁹

All of that said, discrepancies certainly existed between normative prescriptions and material outcomes. And it may be argued that this was especially true in historical moments of flux and uncertainty, such as European encroachment, not to mention the consolidation of a colonial state. Where colonial military reports may be skewed by ideological or political objectives, other state records, like marriage registers, may clarify the status and lives of slaves during this period. Most records kept by the beylik during the Ottoman period, including court records and marriage registries, were destroyed during the French invasion of Algiers in 1830. However, individuals recorded as former slaves (m. *mu'atig*, f. *mu'atiga*) appear in civil registries that were kept during the French presence. In 1853, for example, a freed slave named El-Makki ben Salem divorced an ex-slave

Subalterns and Social Protest: History from Below in the Middle East and North Africa (London; New York: Routledge, 2008).

²⁷ Elke E. Stockreiter, "Child Marriage and Domestic Violence: Islamic and Colonial Discourses on Gender Roles and Female Status in Zanzibar, 1900–1950s," in Emily S. Burrill, Richard L. Roberts, and Elizabeth Thornberry (eds.), *New African Histories: Domestic Violence and the Law in Colonial and Postcolonial Africa* (Athens, OH: Ohio State University Press, 2010): pp. 138–158.

²⁸ Ahmad b. Hattal Tilimsani, *Rihlat Muhammad al-Kabir Bāy al-Gharb al-jazā'iri ilā al-Janūb al-ṣaḥrāwī al-jazā'iri* (al-Qāhira, 1969): p. 15.

²⁹ Stockreiter, "Child Marriage and Domestic Violence": pp. 138–158.

named Khayra, who had belonged to Hussein Dey, the last Ottoman ruler of Algiers. Their marriage was recognized as sound and so Khayra was due the post-marital upkeep (*nafaqa*) that would have been the right of any free-born woman.³⁰

Well into the transition from military to civilian rule in the northern territories (post-1870), former slaves still appear in the Algiers marriage registers. The register for the year 1881 contains the records of at least three marriages in which the husband was recorded as a freed slave. In two of these marriages, the husbands were noted as originating in the southern oasis town of Laghouat. One of these men was Rabah ben Mohammed (age 30), who was working as a day-labourer in Algiers when he married a freed woman named Khedidja, formerly the slave of El-Hajj Ahmed, the Hanafi *mufti* (jurist) of Algiers.³¹ These records give us a glimpse into the routes of migration that some former slaves took after their manumission—a route followed by men for wage-labour opportunities and by women for other reasons we will see below. From the perspective of women like the ex-slave Khedidja, these records also tell us that forms of domestic bondage were tolerated not only by military authorities in remote southern towns but in Algiers itself—even, or perhaps especially, when it involved important elites like a local *mufti*.

Scholars of West Africa have explored what Barbara Cooper has called a “conceptual blurriness” between marriage and slavery in the late colonial period. Writing on the West African town of Sikaso, Emily Burrill has posited that “wealth in people” transferred from slaves, who were increasingly scarce, onto wives.³² French authorities subsequently rallied to protect “the family” by limiting women’s access to divorce. Similarly, Ahmad Sikainga has shown how in Condominium Sudan, many slave women approached British officers for assistance, but when their masters claimed these women were in fact their wives, their cases were sent instead to the local *shari’a* tribunal, where *qadis* often ruled in favour of their fellow

³⁰ ANA (Archives nationales de l’Algérie) D177, *Rasm talaq el-Mekki bin Salem*, No. 429, 4 September 1853.

³¹ ANA D177, *Rasm zawaj Rabah ben Mohammed min Laghouat*, No. 549, 19 October 1881.

³² Emily S. Burrill, “‘Wives of Circumstance’: Gender and Slave Emancipation in Late Nineteenth-century Senegal.” *Slavery & Abolition* 29.1 (2008): pp. 49–64.

slave-owning male elders.³³ These studies find the meeting point between the large scale of major historical change and the small scale of domesticity and intimacy. They show how colonial encounters in the widest sense produced shifts at the nexus of sexuality, servility, and household belonging, with repercussions for social organization.

We can draw from some of these insights to elucidate the following case studies. French authorities in the Mزاب manoeuvred clumsily around issues of “marital or paternal authority,” eager to show how slave women’s sexual availability was an advantageous rather than exploitative condition. Ironically, this insistence by French officers on the benefits bonded women gained through “marriage” to their masters would contribute to the added complexity such women faced when trying to escape unwanted attachment to abusive men. Shifts in the social meaning of sexuality and household, despite their normative obligations and reciprocities, could foreclose opportunities for bonded women to improve their condition, even as new ones were opening.

PART II: SLAVE WOMEN TELL THEIR STORIES

In 1896, a nine-year-old girl of unspecified West African origin found herself in Ghardaïa in the care of the White Sisters (see: Figs. 10.1 and 10.2). The missionaries dubbed the child Mabrouka (a common Arabic slave name meaning “blessed”). Though she arrived speaking neither French nor Arabic, she was eventually able to share her story with the Sisters, from her kidnapping, to her trans-Saharan voyage with her Tuareg captors, to sale into slavery in the Mزاب, to her arrival at the mission station. In the literary tradition of Barbary “captivity narratives” and the slave narratives of Africans brought to the Americas, the nuns published her account for French audiences in a pamphlet entitled *Mabrouka: Histoire d’une petite négresse*.

According to the pamphlet, she was born free into a wealthy family, but her parents both died suddenly at the same time. Her sister married soon after, and Mabrouka and her brother remained with a neighbour who immediately put them to hard labour. One day, while fetching fire wood, she and her brother decided to run away, but while wandering, they were

³³ Ahmad A. Sikainga, “Shari’a’s Courts and the Manumission of Female Slaves in the Sudan, 1898–1939,” *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 28. 1 (1995): pp. 1–24.



Fig. 10.1 Ghardaia mission station. (Source: AGMAfr—Archives Générales des Missionnaires d’Afrique—Photothèque. Rome. Italie, 2010)



Fig. 10.2 White Sisters with néophytes. (Source: AGMAfr—Archives Générales des Missionnaires d’Afrique—Photothèque. Rome. Italie, 2010)

suddenly attacked by two “grands hommes blancs,” kidnapped, and taken to a place with tents and camels, where many men spoke a language she did not understand. These were the Tuaregs, she recalls. The next day, they were put in baskets attached to camels along with another small girl the Tuaregs had captured. Finally, they arrived at market to be sold; Mabrouka was sold first and never again saw her younger brother. As she recounted, she was then sold three times to different masters before the missionaries found her. She described her third master as by far the worst, who starved and beat her almost nightly. Finally, one day, her master presented her to two “handsome Arabs, more white than the others.” They were, naturally, the White Fathers. The two parties “made the arrangements,” and soon she and another young man named Rabah, aged about 15, were travelling back to “the country of the missionaries.”³⁴

Mabrouka’s story is, thus far, the most complete and detailed of all the women who passed through the White Sisters’ station. Her account is consistent with other information we have on journeys of Africans from Bilad as-Sudan who arrived in North Africa bound for enslavement. We may, furthermore, infer that she arrived as part of a fresh wave of women, girls, and boys who arrived from West Africa in the last decade of the nineteenth century, when more peoples became newly vulnerable to enslavement as the French made advances further inland from their West African bases in hopes of consolidating their territories from Algeria across to French West Africa. This triggered a new and steady, though clandestine, trade in slaves whose conditions were noted in various reports. One officer observed at this time that influential families in the oases “buy nothing but women and children of both sexes,” adding that the prestige of a family is often measured “by the number of *nègres* they have raised [*élevés*].”³⁵ Indeed, this period shows a veritable boom in the traffic in sub-Saharan women, with slaves routinely discovered as far north as Tunis. When the French annexed the far-southern towns of El Golea and Ghadames (in present-day Libya), they found what they described as the font of the “*négresse* trade.”

Both Mabrouka and Rabah appear again a few times in the diaries of the Ghardaïa Sisters. The pamphlet alludes only to vague “arrangements”

³⁴ Archives centrales des Soeurs missionnaires de Notre Dame d’Afrique (ACSMNDA), Rome, Italy. “Mabrouka: Histoire d’une Petite Nègresse” (St. Charles, 1898).

³⁵ ANOM 22H/26. Rapport sur l’oued Souf et ses relations commerciales (undated). The term used here could refer either to being “raised,” as in children, or “bred,” as in animals.

between the missionaries and their last master, but references to them in the diaries clearly describe them as having been "bought" by the Fathers. Though the missionaries were keen to have their so-called orphans married, they only succeeded with Rabah, who married a local Black woman named Rebbah. Both were converted and Rebbah received training from the Sisters in the tenets of Christian wife- and motherhood. By 1905, however, the marriage was in trouble, as Rabah expressed a strong desire to return to his homeland. Having bought a camel for the purpose, he told Rebbah to return to her parents and to give their newborn daughter to the Sisters. Rabah does not appear again and we do not learn whether he went through with his plan.³⁶ Mabrouka, on the other hand, seems not to have married, at least not through the missionaries, and when we last hear of her, she is working as a domestic servant in the home of a local French settler.

Most of the women and men who came into the care of the Sisters are described as *nègres* and *négresses*. This term most likely classified them as slaves, as opposed to "noir(e)" to identify free sub-Saharan Africans. Unfortunately, neither the missionaries nor most military observers supplemented their reports with Arabic words that might help us better refine the precise status of these individuals. As such, though the missionary diaries and other records indeed contain numerous stories of vulnerable or exploited Black women, I focus here only on those that explicitly mention the given woman's slavery or provide other strong indications of her status.

One of the more common types of cases involving slave women was conflict with men who claimed that their slaves were in fact their spouses. Indeed, state archives include countless complaints and petitions by tribesmen accused of trafficking or enslaving women, insisting that French officers were holding in custody not their slaves but their legal wives. Other times, masters sent their Black male slaves to present themselves as the woman's husband and claim the slave woman on their behalf.³⁷ To support their cases, some men furnished some kind of marriage document. Initially, these were usually obvious forgeries, but they became more sophisticated

³⁶ ACSMND, White Sisters' Ghardaïa Station Diary, 2 July 1905 (No. 46).

³⁷ For example, ANOM, Préfecture d'Oran, Letter No.28 from the prefect to the commandant general of the subdivision, "au sujet de la négresse Rahma réclamée par le nègre Salem son mari." In this case the master against whom Rahma was claiming emancipation sent his male slave to fill the role of the reclaiming husband. Discussed further in Cordell, "No liberty, not much equality, and very little fraternity," p. 50.

with time, often procured from a local corrupt *qadi*.³⁸ Oftentimes, the women did not realize they had been married.³⁹ Ironically, then, many of the same officers who had embraced bromides about the ameliorative effects of marriage for slaves would profess ignorance in discerning slavery from a ruse marriage. As one officer cautioned, where interference in domestic bondage was a generally sensitive issue,

the question of *négresses* is even more delicate. It will always be difficult to prove that an *indigène* is not married according to Muslim law with his *négresse*, as they are known to take such precautions.⁴⁰

One such case was that of Hamadi ben Younes, a local merchant who lived in Berriane, a town just north of Ghardaïa. In the summer of 1905, ben Younes lost his slave when officers seized girls whose sale was recently reported to the authorities in Ouargla. Three girls in total were seized by the police from different homes: Mabrouka, age 15; Fatma, age 7; and Messaouda, age 14. The last, Messaouda, had belonged to ben Younes, and to press the case for her return, he hired a local lawyer, one Henri Kahn, to submit to the authorities various pieces of evidence that would verify his marriage. These included an act of betrothal and act of marriage by the *qadi* of Berriane. The third document was a letter that ben Younes had written to his brother when he learned of his upcoming trip to Ouargla. He asked his brother to “buy for me a young, pretty, and elegant Black girl aged 12 or younger.”⁴¹ Though the point of submitting this letter as evidence may have been to show that he sought in Messaouda the traits of a sexual companion and not a domestic labourer, it is at least questionable that he went looking for a wife in a slave market. The officer reporting this case to the Governor General declared his scepticism regarding the acts of betrothal and marriage, particularly as 450 francs,

³⁸ For example, ANOM 12H50, Letter No. 924 (Doc No. 1093), sent 4 Mar 1899, by Général Pédoya to the Governor General, “A.P. d’un Hartania et deux négresses esclaves, d’In Salah par une caravane de Géryville.” Earlier such contracts were usually amateurly done and not very convincing. Often, they were not dated or signed, did not indicate the amount of the dowry, and did not indicate whether the women or their guardians (*wali*) was present. On occasion, officers did go to the trouble of having a third party check the veracity of these documents.

³⁹ ANOM 12H50, Gen Pedoya to Gov Gen, 28 Feb 1889.

⁴⁰ ANOM 12H50, Cercle d’Oran, Affaires Indigènes – Gov Gen (undated), “Note sur l’esclavage dans la région d’Ouargla.”

⁴¹ ANOM 12H50, Letter sent 14 Feb 1905.

though the going price for a slave, seemed an unusually high dower for an orphaned girl.⁴² Remarkably, despite his own reservations, the officer recommended that Messaouda, being "nubile," should be returned to ben Younes, and that the latter be given the opportunity to "regularize the marriage."⁴³ Meanwhile, the other two girls were sent on his order to "a trusted home," possibly with the missionaries, or possibly in the care of an officer's wife, as sometimes also happened.

In another similar case, one Hajj Mhamed ben Kassem found himself in direct confrontation with the White Sisters of Ghardaïa. On 3 August 1905, ben Kassem wrote what seems to be one of a long series of letters to the local colonial *commandant* demanding a resolution to the case involving a young woman in his possession named Fatma. Ben Kassem himself was in the northern-eastern city of Constantine on business when he learned remotely, probably from his brother, that Fatma "had been taken to the office of the Commandant Supérieur" of the Mزاب some two months prior. This was despite the production of his act of betrothal before the *qadi* of Berriane (the same *qadi* whose acts of betrothal had recently been flagged as potentially fraudulent). He wrote again when he received the news that she was now staying with the Sisters of Ghardaïa. Ben Kassem's letter repeated prior claims that the marriage was sound, having "taken place before everyone," but that he had no intention of consummating the marriage until she was of a nubile age. Moreover, this "young *nègresse* provided company to my wife," he wrote, closing his letter with an appeal to French justice.⁴⁴ For their part, the White Sisters recorded in their diary that month the arrival of a young woman named "Fathima," a girl "stolen from the Sudan" and sent by a lieutenant friend of the mission to be cared for until they received further orders. The Sisters recount that Fathima had been sold three times since she arrived in Ghardaïa, and that she had not "been taken" away, as ben Kassem claimed, but had in fact fled his household in secret. Moreover, the Sisters were familiar with her current mistress, whose other slaves had in the past received medical care at the Sisters' hospital for injuries and disorders resulting of abuse and neglect.⁴⁵ Unfortunately, we have no indications as to how Fatma/Fathima's case was resolved.

⁴² It is nearly impossible to confirm this; however, the White Sisters' diaries include the details of a betrothal between a Black man and Black woman for which the dower paid was 100 francs.

⁴³ ANOM 12H50, Div Alger to Gouv. Gen. re "Nègresses saisies à Berriane."

⁴⁴ ANOM 12H50, Letters to Gouv. Gen. sent 23 April and 3 Aug 1905.

⁴⁵ ACSMND, White Sisters' Ghardaïa Diary, 23 Aug 1905: p. 203.

Cases involving slave wives acquire another layer of complexity when women employed the strategy of seeking emancipation from their masters through divorce. Understanding the ambivalence of the colonial military authority, many enslaved women fled north either to Tunisia or to the civil territories of Algeria's coastal Tell region. But upon arriving, some were forced to acquit themselves as "wives" if their "husbands" pursued them. They usually found the urban *qadis* and civil French prefects to be more receptive (and less corrupt) than their respective rural and military counterparts. Allan Christelow discusses one such case: In 1859 in Mostaganem, near Oran, the sub-prefect annulled the marriage of a Black woman who had fled to civil territory from her former master. He was able to do so with the help of a local *mufti* who gave the necessary *fatwa* (legal opinion) to legitimize the French justice's ruling, absent the husband's consent.⁴⁶

Thus far, we have looked at a sample of cases in which women and girls were held in slavery by purported acts of marriage. Cases involving the children of slaves may help to further clarify our understanding of the use of bonded women's reproductive labour—women who might have otherwise appealed to the rights obtaining to slaves made pregnant by their masters.

In September 1900, a slave woman arrived at the White Sisters station after having escaped from her previous household in Metlili. As she told the Sisters, she had been "constantly beaten" by her master and arrived starving and exhausted, saved only by the fact that she had smuggled herself onto trains for large portions of the journey. The next day, write the Sisters, she appeared relieved at having escaped and survived the journey to that point, but was also burdened by the guilt of leaving her two small children, one boy and one girl, in the hands of master, who were likewise beaten and malnourished.⁴⁷ Were these her children by her master, by another slave, or some other man? The woman mentions no husband, not even one who is deceased, which gives some credence to the possibility that they were her master's children whom he kept, contrary to established tradition, as domestics. Moreover, as the following case indicates,

⁴⁶ Christelow, *Muslim law courts and the French colonial state in Algeria*: p. 121. Another girl named Khadija, aged 18, was not so lucky when she fled to Constantine in 1866 and tried to divorce her husband whom she said was in reality her master. The presiding qadi determined that there were no grounds for divorce and she was forced to return.

⁴⁷ ACSMND, White Sisters' Ghardaïa Diary, 12–13 Sept 1900.

fleeing with one's masters' children (or even those whom the master only claims are his) may have added extra danger and difficulty to a slave woman's bid to escape.

In 1903, the White Sisters received another woman who managed to flee, this time with her children. As the Sisters report, on 8 January, a "family of black slaves" appeared at their door, composed of "a mother, two daughters, and a cripple, seeking refuge." After running for one night and one day, they were briefly taken in by a local free Black woman who then sent them to the Sisters, advising that their master would have a harder time reclaiming them there. The woman had also approached the local French authorities, but though they assured her she was free, they apparently offered no assistance. The slave family's relief was shattered the next day, when their master appeared at the mission, claiming that the woman was his wife and that the children were indeed his own. They took the affair again to the local commandant who took the master's side. The whole family was forced to return.⁴⁸

This case offers rare insight into the politics of paternity in such cases. Prior to their master's arrival, the two young girls expressed an eagerness to "see their father again," likely another slave or ex-slave. Thus, at least two men might have claimed paternity for these children, but, for whatever reason, the commandant did not bother to investigate the legitimacy of the other claim, nor try to locate or question the man the girls regarded as their true father. We also learn from both of these two cases that while the French commandants took it upon themselves to place slaves seized through police action in the Sisters' care or in private homes, they were more reluctant when it came to fugitive women.

In a third case for which we have less information, the Sisters described the upcoming wedding of a "young *négresse*" named Fathma in January 1905, who had escaped slavery in Ouargla about 18 months prior and had been living with the Sisters ever since. Upon entering her new marriage, she had decided to give her two small children, Yamina and Cherif, to the missionaries to be raised and educated. The Sisters, in turn, were delighted to care for "these two small mulattos of good nature."⁴⁹ Unlike the women in our previous two cases, Fathma was apparently lucky enough to both escape and bring her children with her. Explicitly described as mixed-race children, it is highly likely they were the product of Fathma's relations

⁴⁸ ACSMND, White Sisters' Ghardaia Diary, 8 Jan 1903.

⁴⁹ ACSMND, White Sisters' Ghardaia Diary, 2 Jan 1905.

with her master. But why her master did not claim a spousal relationship and paternity of the children, or why he tried to but failed where others succeeded, cannot be answered at this time.

It is worth adding here that what emerges from the Sisters' diaries, which is rarely to be found in the more clinical French military reports, is the degree of physical abuse and emotional stress experienced by the girls and women who were treated in their hospital. Women arrived with scars from beatings as well as burn marks attributed to their masters' abuse. In late May of 1905, a young girl of ten years was brought to the Sisters' hospital with an advanced lung disease and other injuries. The Sisters noted that she had arrived in the Mزاب relatively healthy two years ago, was bought for 500 francs, and had since shown signs of failing health due to "labour beyond her years."⁵⁰

Local newspapers were quick to pick up on the growing influx of women slaves starting in the last decade of the nineteenth century. In 1896, the case of one bondswoman named Fatma was printed by several liberal newspapers. As *La Dépêche* declared:

Slavery still exists among the tribes of the High-Plateaux of [the administrative unit of] South Oran. The proof is furnished by a young black woman from the tribe of Oulad Mansourah who brought her story to the attention of the police of Saida, from which it was learned that the fugitive had a master who possessed even more *négresses* as well as the children of these slaves, whom he sold and exchanged. *La Patrie* [another regional paper] concluded that these charges are strong enough to warrant an investigation by the military authority.⁵¹

These allegations, indeed serious, did prompt an investigation. The man accused was identified as Hadj el-Habibould el-Mebkhout, a vastly wealthy and influential appointed chief. In a letter he wrote to the commandant in charge of the investigation, he refuted Fatma's charges and counter-accused her of theft and deceit. Hardly mistreated, el-Mebkhout claimed, Fatma enjoyed the utmost privilege and was dressed in the finest clothes. As his favourite, she had joined el-Mebkhout on his travels and was, as he put it, "like a wife to me." He added, furthermore, that he was well within his rights and local custom to "surround [him]self" with slave women, a regular practice for all men who were "owners of beasts of burden."

⁵⁰ ACSMND, White Sisters' Ghardaïa Diary, 22 May 1905.

⁵¹ *La Dépêche Algérienne*, Thurs, 3 Dec 1896 (No. 4156).

Finally, he accused her of theft with an accomplice, a freeman named Barka, who had stolen items of jewellery the night she fled.⁵² For over a year, the investigation continued. Others were interrogated, including the accused man's wives and other slaves, all of whom professed good treatment at their master's hand. El Mebkhout's brother and sons further attested that Fatma had been "equal to one of his wives." Nonetheless, the French officer leading the investigation was not convinced by the accusations of theft and felt it necessary to question Fatma and Barka. He had them summoned, but they could not be found in the Black settlement where they had been living, having left for an unknown destination. The case was subsequently left unresolved.

If we are to believe el Mebkhout's "character witnesses," Fatma had enjoyed a position few slaves would leave by choice. Fatma was at perhaps the peak of the domestic hierarchy, in some ways more privileged than el-Mebkhout's wives. One is thus left wondering why Fatma would abandon such an apparently splendid lifestyle for squalor and a rootless life. Was it for thwarted love of Barka that she left and took revenge by trying to muddy her ex-master's reputation? Or was there truth to her allegations? Besides his wealth and position, el-Mebkhout would have been well known to the French officers: His father had been a lieutenant in Emir Abdelkader's resistance forces against the French before switching sides and joining MacMohan. And el-Mebkhout himself had been involved in various military campaigns that had contributed to the Saharan "pacification" scheme. For his family's service to the colonial state, he was given the title of *agha* the very year of this investigation.⁵³ While el-Mebkhout had tremendous clout and influence, as well as a host of allies and dependents to back his version of the story, Fatma's charges, despite their gravity, were only as good as her word. It does not appear that the investigating officer bothered to find nearby friends, neighbours, or family members beyond the walls of el-Mebkhout's household. Against such odds, and against a colonial administration that had shown itself consistently unkind to fugitive slave women, Fatma and Barka did the only logical thing: they skipped town.

Despite an assortment of stories of abuse, neglect, flight, and exploitation, we should not take all of these cases to mean that slave women were uniformly mistreated. We learn more about abuse from the White Sisters'

⁵² ANOM 12H50, Letter to Sup, Cercle de Mecheria, 6 Dec 1896.

⁵³ J. Bouveresse, *Un parlement colonial?: les délégations financières algériennes, 1898–1945* (Mont-Saint-Aignan: Univ. de Rouen et du Havre, 2008): p. 715.

journals, for instance, because they had less reason and opportunity to cross paths with well-treated slave women or document their experiences. Nonetheless, their journals do include frequent passing references to slave women showing another side to domestic social life, one in which women from Bilad as-Sudan, once incorporated, could expect to become trusted and even cherished members of their new households. In the 1920s, one noted female anthropologist wrote that, “slaves were no longer sold in the Mزاب” and though there were occasional “exchanges,” most domestic slaves were largely incorporated into families and enjoyed lives “relatively kinder and more egalitarian than our domestics in France.” Nonetheless, this observer clearly distinguished women’s menial from sexual servitude in the Mزاب, noting that, “if the *femme légitime* consents to it, the *négresse* is often kept as a concubine.” Despite their relatively contented circumstances, the author adds, when the day’s work is done and the children are asleep, Black women can be heard indulging in fond memories of “leur pays soudanaise.”⁵⁴

1906: ENCODING NON-INTERFERENCE AS RESPECT FOR THE “PRIVATE”

The above cases give us some new insight into the domestic lives of slave women in the Algerian interior, but they also leave many questions unanswered. We might wonder why men would pay upwards of 700–800 francs for a girl or woman slave only to mistreat and neglect her. Part of the answer may be drawn from the fact that, more than productive value, masters derived social capital from control of the labour and sexuality of slaves. It also emerges that, since French authorities were willing to accept female servility only under the auspices of matrimony, slave-owning men in the Mزاب were quick to represent their relationship with the Black women they bought as marital as well as servile. The cases involving children provide further insight about women whose reproductive labour was also abused, given that their masters seemed to either deny paternity or otherwise eschew conventions around *umm al-walad* rights and entitlements. Little wonder, then, that so many women escaped when the opportunity arose: as slaves, they had had some options and some recourse if their

⁵⁴ Amélie Marie Goichon, *La Vie féminine au Mزاب. Étude de sociologie musulmane* (Paris: Librairie orientaliste Paul Geuthner, 1927): pp. 119–120.

rights, particularly as a result of pregnancy, were violated, but as ersatz "wives" in a precarious position of de facto slavery, and with few places to turn, their circumstances were indeed grim.

Colonial intervention clearly had drastic implications for women's slavery in the Mزاب, not only by materially altering the socio-political and economic landscape but through the dissemination of official knowledge on the lives of women slaves. These ethnographic and military opinions reflected partial or biased understandings of normative prescriptions for the treatment of slave women in Islam, but were powerful in shaping policies and iterating into reality the conditions that would in fact confine many women to enslavement. The French assertion of jurisdiction over all matters of public law and adjacent hesitance to "interfere" in issues related to women and especially "the family" only compounded this bind in which slave women found themselves.

This returns us to the 1906 decree which opened this chapter, and raises a final point of argument: that the 1906 law, in preserving men's ability to use slaves' sexual and reproductive labour, also tacitly accepted their right to abuse it. Recall the law's fourth article stipulating the integrity of all "rights resulting of paternal power, guardianship or marriage over minors or married women, in so much as acts performed do not constitute temporary or permanent servitude for the benefit of those other than these minor or women." What this clause indicates is that by this point the French colonial government was fully cognizant of the intersections of patriarchal and slave systems.

By the turn of the century, the trade in Black women for domestic servitude and concubinage was drawing greater public and official attention. This public debate, coupled with the 1902 creation of the "Territoires du Sud" in the Algerian interior, finally prompted an official inquiry in this trade. Indeed, the first two cases above, of ben Kassem and ben Younes, frequently appear in notes on early drafts of the 1906 law, among other examples pointing to an increase in such transactions and the need for reform. This makes the inclusion of the fourth clause all the more surprising. The process behind the drafting of the law, however, reveals its logic. In his consultations with the Prosecutor General and other legal experts, Governor General Jonnart referred to an earlier ruling by the Court of Appeals in Algiers that delineated matters punishable under French law as only those which "concerned the public order." Jonnart proposed, therefore, that in claiming the right to punish slave traders and slave owners,

the colonial state must adhere to that stipulation. The addition of the fourth clause would satisfy that condition, and avoid accusations of meddling with “Koranic law.” The gendered notions of “freedom” that informed this logic cohered around an implicitly masculine subject of emancipation, one whose labour was a matter of “the public order.” The fact that slave women performed both “public” and “private” kinds of labour defied such static categories of “freedom” and “unfreedom.”

In proposing these criteria, Jonnart cast the dye that would obscure women’s slavery, thus formalizing the informal rules laid out by Bugeaud regarding bonded women some 60 years earlier. Women’s productive labour (as slaves in a conventional sense) became subject to public law and French control, while a cloak of personal status law was drawn over their sexual labour (as wives/“wives” and concubines). Clearly, this distinction was artificial and unenforceable, but authorities pried them apart legislatively, claiming jurisdiction over the former and leaving the latter to the control of local men.

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INDEX¹

A

Abolition, 24, 51–73, 129, 136, 141,
182, 186

African slaves, 4, 102–104, 103n6,
103n8, 109, 109n21, 111, 112,
118, 122, 134, 135, 135n7, 141,
158, 166–168, 173, 175

as status symbols, 65

Afro-Persian dialect, 108, 108n17

Algeria, 18, 179–202

Ambiguous visibility, 37, 43

Angel in the house, 59, 64

Apartheid, 38, 40, 42–48

Arabian Gulf, 125–151

B

Bacchanalian games, 117–118

Baderoon, G., 5, 37

Barbary corsairs, 155, 160

Batavian Code (Statutes of India), 42

Black, 4, 42–46, 48, 56, 57, 61, 76,
76n3, 78, 78n13, 79, 81, 84–89,
91–93, 96, 97, 100, 103, 108,
117, 120, 136, 142, 147,
182, 199

Black women, 42, 48, 58, 59, 100,
187, 193, 200, 201

C

Cape Colony, 38, 39, 41–45

Cape Malay, 44–46

apartheid, 44, 45

Castration, 76, 77n7, 79, 82, 84,
86–88

Cathcart, James, 155, 157, 158, 169,
172, 173

Colonialism, 15, 22, 38, 40, 52, 180
French, 181, 182, 201

Coloured, 44–47

Concubinage, 7–36, 187, 201

¹ Note: Page numbers followed by ‘n’ refer to notes.

Concubine(s), 2, 4, 9–26, 28, 30, 32, 33, 36, 65, 65n27, 75, 91–93, 100, 103, 109, 109n20, 113, 114n29, 117, 119, 122, 131, 135, 135n7, 142, 143, 162, 181, 186, 188, 200, 202

Cooper, Frederick, 7–36

D

Descendents of slaves, 141

Despotism, 79, 113

eunuch, 88

Devshirme, 168, 173

Divorce (and women's emancipation), 21, 27, 104, 122, 137, 156, 181, 188, 189, 196, 196n46

Domestic/household slavery, 2, 25, 27, 31, 65, 65n26, 102, 103, 103n6, 120, 125–151, 166, 185, 188, 200

Dutch East India Company, 39, 41, 175

E

East Africa ('Swahili Coast', Kenya), 7–36, 39, 45, 185

Education of princes, 115

Emirati households, 134

Eunuchs, 2, 14n24, 52n1, 75–89, 112–114, 114n29, 117, 119, 122

F

Female slaves, 11, 13, 14n24, 23, 23n57, 25, 28, 30, 32n82, 33n85, 34, 56, 59, 64, 65, 92, 93, 100, 126, 140, 142–144, 144n19

Feminist, 57, 66–68, 180

Former slaves, 8, 11, 28, 31, 33, 91, 92, 95–97, 125–129, 131, 133, 134, 134n5, 138–142, 146–150, 188, 189

Freed slaves (male, female), 14, 24, 25, 27, 27n69, 34, 94–100, 188, 189

Fugitive slaves, 199

G

Gender, 1, 3, 12, 14, 14n24, 14n25, 27, 30, 52, 54–57, 64, 67, 68, 77, 91–100, 111, 113, 144–146, 148, 180, 181, 202

Ghardaïa, 184, 190–192, 194, 195

H

Harem, 13, 14n24, 15, 15n29, 16, 54–59, 64–68, 76–86, 76n2, 76n3, 76n6, 77n7, 101–123, 142, 144

Harem of Nasir al-Din Shah, 112

Household, 4, 5, 11, 12n20, 13, 13n23, 14n24, 16–20, 22–24, 26–28, 26n66, 28n71, 30–33, 39, 53, 65, 91–100, 103, 118, 121, 122, 125, 127, 134–136, 138, 141–146, 166, 168, 179–202

Humanity, 2, 4, 82, 87, 131

I

Ideology of slavery, 8, 12, 14

Imperialism, 44, 52, 54, 55, 55n10, 57, 65, 66

Islam, 3, 4, 8, 10–13, 13n23, 23, 25–30, 26n66, 27n69, 32, 34, 37–48, 51, 65n26, 67, 93, 129–131, 129n1, 136, 137, 162, 183, 186, 201

J

Janissary, 162, 168, 169

K

Khoisan, 38–40, 42, 45
Kuloğlu, 169

M

Malay, 40, 43–47
Male slaves, 17, 27n70, 56, 142,
144n19, 193n37
Manumission, 4, 11, 12, 17, 21,
23, 24, 29, 33, 93, 132,
133, 147, 156, 174–176,
181, 189
Matron Nanny, 108, 108n17, 109,
116, 121
Middle East, 1–4, 8, 13n23, 15,
51–73, 132, 142, 160, 165, 174,
176, 177, 180
Missionaries (White Sisters and
White Fathers missionary
societies), 181
Mistress (female slave owner),
14–26, 28, 31
Mzab, 179, 182–190, 195, 198,
200, 201

N

North Africa, 1, 2, 4, 5, 25n66,
51–73, 159, 160, 164,
166, 167, 180, 182,
185, 187, 192
North Africa (Morocco), 15, 15n29,
16, 26, 30, 54, 184

O

Ocak, 168, 169
Orientalism
slavery, 51–73
travel, 51
woman, 60

P

Papaluna, 170, 171, 176
Pearl trading, 142
Photographs, 72, 102, 105, 105n12,
106, 109–112, 123, 181
Picturesque, 37, 41, 43, 45–47
Post-apartheid, 37, 41, 43

R

Race, 1, 37–48, 52, 56–58,
60, 65, 66, 91–100,
111, 148, 176
Ranking of slaves, 109, 172
Ransom slavery, 156, 157, 159,
160, 177
“Ratiep”, 40
Resistance, 39–41, 75–89, 121, 141,
150, 199

S

Sexual and reproductive
labor, 201
Sexual slavery, 41
Sharia (Islamic law), 12
Sheikh Yusuf of Makassah, 40
Silence of slaves, 132
Slave Lodge, 41
Slave trade, 39, 51, 55, 101, 102,
102n2, 129, 134, 136, 158, 162,
167, 182, 185, 187
Slave voices, 132, 134
Stilwell, Sean, 176

T

Taj al-Sultana, 114
Tehran census, 103
Toledano, Ehud, 4, 53, 57n17, 76n2,
131, 134, 162, 166
Trans-Saharan slave trade, 182

U

Umm al-walad ('mother of the child'),
12, 13, 15, 16, 16n33, 18, 19,
19n40, 21, 23, 27, 30, 31, 34,
35, 187, 188, 200

V

Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie
(VOC), 39, 40, 44

W

Wala (post-manumission
relationship), 11, 24,
29, 29n74

West Africa (Mauritania, Nigeria),
2, 15, 16, 26, 28, 29n74,
29n75, 34, 35, 39, 183,
189, 192

White slavery,
59, 66